

“Why were the former days better than these?”: An Examination of Temporal
Horizons in Ecclesiastes

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Abstract

A number of studies explore temporal vocabulary in the Old Testament generally and Ecclesiastes particularly, yet few attempt a holistic approach of reading Ecclesiastes through its presentation of time. Scholars have long recognized the work's tensions, but the link that holds the tensions together in a unified reading has received less attention. This unifying idea is the presentation of time. Time is not a singular concept, however, and this project undertakes a sustained engagement with the broad presentation of time both to examine Ecclesiastes' inquiry after what is good for human beings and its often-identified tensions. As such, this study fills a considerable gap in current Ecclesiastes scholarship.

Part One, consisting of chapters two and three, examines terms for time, including עת, יום, דור, עולם, שנה, and זכרון/זכר, through a close examination of these words in their contexts. It becomes clear that time in Ecclesiastes is a mixture of reflections on the main character's present, the past, and the passing of time over the course of generations. The project argues in Part Two that approaching time with an awareness of how Ecclesiastes creates, compares, and contrasts time horizons aids the reader to comprehend the contradictions and tensions. Chapter four demonstrates the presence of identifiable and quantifiable horizons in what is widely regarded as the introduction of Ecclesiastes, 1:1-2:26. These horizons, identified as nature's time, generation time, lifespan time and event time, are juxtaposed in order to point toward the benefit of short-duration thinking for life under the sun. Chapter five examines Ecclesiastes 3:1-12:14 according to the categories of nature's time, generation time, and lifespan time to ascertain characteristics common to these horizons. Consistently, Ecclesiastes presents these horizons of time as impenetrable and inaccessible to human endeavour. Chapter six examines the same material but from the perspective of what occurs in defined situations, which are designated event time. Ecclesiastes presents event time as partially controllable thereby suggesting proper and improper uses within this horizon. The chapter concludes with a discussion of wisdom and event time, demonstrating that wisdom in Ecclesiastes is not focused on success over one's whole life (lifespan time), but focuses upon capturing the potential of the present moment to provide rest, companionship, and enjoyment in the short-term. The exploration of time as temporal horizons suggests an opportunity to observe similar phenomena in other works associated with wisdom and in other non-narrative works within the Hebrew Bible.

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Abbreviations

AB	Anchor Bible
AnBib	Analecta biblica
AOAT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament
<i>AusBR</i>	<i>Australian Biblical Review</i>
<i>AUSS</i>	<i>Andrews University Seminary Studies</i>
AUU,SUU	Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, Studia Semitica Upsaliensia
BBB	Bonner biblische Beiträge
BDB	Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, <i>A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> (repr., London: Oxford University Press, 1962)
BETL	Bibliotheca ephemeridum theologicarum lovaniensium
<i>BHQ</i>	<i>General Introduction and Megilloth. Biblia Hebraica Quinta</i> (6 th ed.; Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2004)
<i>BHS</i>	K. Elliger and W. Rudolph, eds., <i>Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia</i> (5 th ed.; Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1997)
BKAT	Biblischer Kommentar, Altes Testament
<i>BibInt</i>	<i>Biblical Interpretation</i>
<i>BT</i>	<i>The Bible Translator</i>
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CC	Continental Commentary
<i>Colloq</i>	<i>Colloquium</i>
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CBQMS	Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series
<i>DCH</i>	David J.A. Clines, John Elwolde, eds., <i>Dictionary of Classical Hebrew</i> (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993-)
<i>EvT</i>	<i>Evangelische Theologie</i>

Abbreviations

GKC	Wilhelm Gesenius, <i>Hebrew Grammar</i> , ed. E. Kautzsch, trans. A.E. Cowley (2d ed.; Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1910)
<i>HALOT</i>	Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, Johann Jakob Stamm, and Benedikt Hartmann, <i>Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> , ed. and trans. M.E.J. Richardson et al. (5 vols.; Leiden: Brill, 1994-1999)
HAT	Handbuch zum Alten Testament
HBS	Herders biblische Studien
HKAT	Handkommentar zum Alten Testament
<i>HS</i>	<i>Hebrew Studies</i>
HThKAT	Herders theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament
<i>HUCA</i>	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
ICC	International Critical Commentary
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
IRT	Issues in Religion and Theology
Jastrow	M. Jastrow, <i>A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature</i> (New York: Judaica Press, 2004).
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
J-M	P. Joüon and T. Muraoka, <i>A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew</i> (reprint of First edition with corrections, 2 vols.; Roma: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2003)
<i>JJS</i>	<i>Journal of Jewish Studies</i>
<i>JNES</i>	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
<i>JNSL</i>	<i>Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages</i>
<i>JQR</i>	<i>Jewish Quarterly Review</i>
JSJSup	Journal for the Study of Judaism Supplement Series

Abbreviations

<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
KJV	King James (Authorized) Version
<i>LTP</i>	<i>Laval théologique et philosophique</i>
NAB	New American Bible
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NCBC	New Century Bible Commentary
NEB	New English Bible
NIBCOT	New International Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NJB	New Jerusalem Bible
NJPSV	New Jewish Publication Society Version
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
OLA	Orientalia lovaniensia analecta
OTL	Old Testament Library
<i>PIBA</i>	<i>Proceedings of the Irish Biblical Association</i>
SBAB	Stuttgarter biblische Aufsatzbände
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
<i>SBTh</i>	<i>Studia biblica et theologica</i>
<i>ScEs</i>	<i>Science et esprit</i>
SESJ	Suomen Eksegeettisen Seuran julkaisuja
<i>SJT</i>	<i>Scottish Journal of Theology</i>
STDJ	Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah
<i>TD</i>	<i>Theology Digest</i>
<i>TDOT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i> , ed. G.J. Botterweck et al. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974-)
<i>Them</i>	<i>Themelios</i>

Abbreviations

<i>UF</i>	<i>Ugarit-Forschungen</i>
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
W-O	B.K. Waltke and M. O'Connor, <i>Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax</i> (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990)
<i>ZAH</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Althebraistik</i>
<i>ZAW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
<i>ZTK</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche</i>

Chapter One: Time and Ecclesiastes

In the Beginning

Ecclesiastes operates in an unconventional manner even among the rather unconventional works that make up the *Ketuvim* of the Hebrew Bible.¹ Ecclesiastes begins by stating the conclusion that all things are הבל, which is variously translated as vanity/absurd/enigmatic, before posing the central question: “What advantage is to a human in all his/her toil at which he/she toils under the sun?” This conclusion becomes reinforced throughout Ecclesiastes as the pronouncement that “all is” הבל or “this is” הבל surfaces over 20 times.² The conclusion resurfaces yet again in 12:8 as the twin of the opening statement repeating “all is” הבל.

It must be with some amusement, then, that the reader who finishes the main body consisting of the morose words of Qoheleth comes upon the pronouncement of the frame-narrator in 12:9 that Qoheleth was “wise” and “taught the people knowledge, weighing and studying and arranging many proverbs.” The narrator informs the reader that others have found great value in Qoheleth’s words. Further into the epilogue, the parting words of Ecclesiastes declare the judgement that “all has been heard. Fear God, and his commandments keep; for this is everything for humans. For every work God will bring into judgment, upon every secret thing, whether good or evil” (12:13-14). This declaration that “all has been heard” suggests that the conclusion to “Fear God, and keep his commandments” arises from an interaction with the words of the sage Qoheleth himself. But the disjunction is clear. The connection between the sometimes impious words of Qoheleth and the piously orthodox pronouncement to “fear God and keep his commandments” is so strained that these verses are often ascribed to a different writer altogether.³

Not only is the careful reader aware of disparity between the words of Qoheleth and the epilogue, but the reader cannot help noting the tensions within the

¹ Here we are thinking of a work such as Esther that has no mention of God, or Proverbs, which does not make use of Israel’s national history, or Job with its non-Israelite hero.

² Reference to “all” (כל) being הבל can be found in Eccl 1:2, 14; 2:11, 17; 3:19; 11:8; 12:8. The reference to “this” as הבל occurs in Eccl 2:1, 15, 19, 21, 23, 26; 4:4, 8, 16; 5:9; 6:2, 9; 7:6; 8:10, 14

³ So, for example, Antoon Schoors, *The Preacher Sought To Find Pleasing Words: A Study of the Language of Qoheleth. Part II: Vocabulary*, OLA 143 (Leuven: Peeter’s Press, 2004), 238, and James L. Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes: A Commentary*, OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1987), 190 among others.

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words of Qoheleth himself. As an example, Qoheleth writes early on of his successful quest for wisdom (1:16) but also acknowledges that this quest increased sorrow (1:18). He lifts up the value of wisdom (2:13-14), yet disparages his own search for wisdom in light of the common fate that comes to the wise and the fool (2:16). This wisdom tension continues throughout the work. Though Qoheleth speaks of obtaining more wisdom than anyone before him, he confesses in 7:23 that in seeking to be wise “it was far from me.” Qoheleth advocates wisdom’s ability to strengthen its user “more than ten rulers that are in a city” (7:18) and confesses, “wisdom is better than weapons of war” (9:18a) but also acknowledges, “one bungler destroys much good” (v. 18b). Subtle contrasts and tensions abound throughout Ecclesiastes.

In order to relieve the tensions that are so apparent, earlier scholars resorted to diachronic analysis identifying the hands of different editors and redactors. This is visible, for example, in the work of Haupt,⁴ Siegfried,⁵ McNeile,⁶ and Barton.⁷ Haupt made a particularly striking statement regarding authorship when he remarked, “If the book in its present shape should have been written by one author, he must have been a duplex personality of the HYDE-JEKYLL type.”⁸ Siegfried’s work detailed the presence of nine different hands,⁹ while McNeile posited a more palatable three: Qoheleth, a subsequent wise man, and finally a pious Jew of the Hasidim.¹⁰ Though Barton does not always line up with the glosses proposed by McNeile and Siegfried, he also saw the hand of a *Hokma* glossator, who also served as editor, and that of a *Chasid* glossator, who added the pious elements that seem to bristle in their context. But these attempts to remove the tensions via the re-discovery of different hands created further tensions as these distinctions are based

⁴ Paul Haupt, *The Book of Ecclesiastes* (Baltimore, MD: The John Hopkins Press, 1905).

⁵ Carl Siegfried, *Prediger und Hoheslied*, HKAT II 3,2 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1898).

⁶ Alan Hugh McNeile, *An Introduction to Ecclesiastes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1904).

⁷ George A. Barton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Ecclesiastes*, ICC 17 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1908).

⁸ Paul Haupt, “The Book of Ecclesiastes,” in *A Selection of Papers Read Before The Oriental Club of Philadelphia 1888-1894*, Oriental Studies (Boston: Ginn & Company, 1894), 254.

⁹ Siegfried, *Prediger und Hoheslied*, 2-3. For as he states in his introduction, “In der That zeigt das Buch Q eine solche Menge radikaler Widersprüche, dass es ganz unmöglich ist, es für ein einheitliches Ganze zu halten.”

¹⁰ McNeile, *Ecclesiastes*, 21-28.

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more upon what the critic feels represent a unified position rather than any indication in the text itself that the reader should engage the world of the text in this manner.

The paradigmatic shift in biblical studies that accompanied the shift in literary studies more generally has led many scholars away from diachronic methods toward synchronic readings. The result is a host of new studies aimed at promoting a reading of Ecclesiastes as a unified composition and assigning the tensions not to the hands of others, but rather to the use of sources by Qoheleth and the subsequent dialogue with those sources. Gordis suggested that the use of quotations in ancient literature, especially wisdom literature, was widespread:

These might be cited, as in *Koheleth*, in order to serve as the text for an ironic or negating comment, or they might occur as in *Job*, where the speaker cites the words and sentiments of his opponents in order to demolish them, or quotes the utterances of the Lord in order to submit to him.¹¹

Whybray,¹² as well as Michel,¹³ have followed Gordis' quotation theory. Many of the contradictory elements one finds in Ecclesiastes, then, result from the inability on the part of the reader to distinguish Qoheleth from his use of sources with whom he dialogues. One can see this at work, for example, in 4:5-6:

⁵Fools fold their hands
and consume their own flesh.
⁶Better is a handful with quiet
than two handfuls with toil,
and a chasing after wind.

Gordis suggests that this represents a proverb following a "conventional view" (v. 5), which is then contradicted by the view presented in v. 6.¹⁴ Whybray similarly posits that both v. 5 and v. 6 are quotations of previously occurring proverbial material

¹¹ Robert Gordis, *Koheleth—the man and his world: A Study of Ecclesiastes*, 3d ed. (New York: Schocken, 1968), 96. He further defines these quotations as "*words which do not reflect the present sentiments of the author of the literary composition in which they are found, but have been introduced by the author to convey the standpoint of another person or situation*" (italics his).

¹² Roger Norman Whybray, "The Identification and Use of Quotations in Ecclesiastes," in *Congress Volume, Vienna 1980*, ed. J.A. Emerton, VTSup 32 (Leiden: Brill, 1981), 436 acknowledges Gordis' contribution, and sees himself as building upon them.

¹³ Diethelm Michel, *Qohelet*, ErFor 258 (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1988), 27-29 where he expresses his general agreement with Gordis' approach.

¹⁴ Gordis, *Man and His World*, 107.

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based on the fact that every word occurs “frequently in classical Hebrew or in Proverbs.”¹⁵ He contends that these two sayings are given “relative approval” by Qoheleth but that v. 6 does provide a slight correction to v. 5.¹⁶

The quotation theory, however, has been rightfully dealt a serious blow by the critique of Fox who argues that while it is not impossible to introduce a quotation without some sort of marking, there is little burden on the part of the reader to look for unmarked quotations and, “if there is no marking at all we must start with the assumption that there is no quotation, or at least that the quotation is an expression of the speaker’s viewpoint and sentiments.”¹⁷ The markers that Fox discovers elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible as indicating quotations of alternative points of view are largely, if not entirely, absent from Ecclesiastes.¹⁸ Sayings in Ecclesiastes are thoroughly integrated into their contexts so it is difficult to claim that one saying represents the thought of Qoheleth while another does not.

Even those who embraced the quotation theory, however, still posited that Ecclesiastes is the work of more than one hand. The introduction, which identifies Qoheleth as the “son of David, king in Jerusalem,” and the epilogue, which exhorts the reader to consider Qoheleth as a wise man who taught knowledge, continue to be considered as the work of an additional editor, even for those who consider the main body as coming from one individual.¹⁹

¹⁵ Whybray, “Quotations in Ecclesiastes,” 440.

¹⁶ Whybray, “Quotations in Ecclesiastes,” 450. Norbert Lohfink, *Qoheleth*, CC (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 69 also identifies v. 5 as “an astonishing saying of old-time wisdom.” He further suggests (70) that the reader should take vv. 5 and 6 as stating opposite conclusions.

¹⁷ Michael V. Fox, “The Identification of Quotations in Biblical Literature,” *ZAW* 92 (1980): 427.

¹⁸ Fox, “Quotations in Biblical Literature” offers the following criteria: 1) Marking by explicit verbs of speaking, thinking (421); 2) Virtual marking (422). The conditions for virtual marking are: a) another subject present so the reader has no trouble knowing who the speaker might be (423); b) there is a virtual *verbum dicendi* that implies speech (423); c) the switch is signaled by a change in grammatical number and person. If any of these signs are missing, Fox argued that it still can be a quotation, but the probability is lower.

¹⁹ Ludger Schwienhorst-Schönberger, *Kohelet*, ed. Erich Zenger, HThKAT (Freiburg: Herder, 2004), 64, who holds to the essential unity of Ecclesiastes follows the convention that 12:9-11 and 12:12-14 arise from two different epilogists. The difference for him is that the epilogue does not deride the work as a whole but instead defends it. Izak J.J. Spangenberg, “A Century of Wrestling with Qohelet: The Research History of the Book Illustrated with a Discussion of Qoh 4,17-5,6,” in *Qohelet in the Context of Wisdom*, ed. A. Schoors, BETL 136 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1998), 75 insightfully remarks that “Although the studies of Gordis, Good, Loader, Fox, and Witzernath had an impact on the study of Qohelet and most scholars nowadays agree that the book is essentially the work of one author, only a few scholars really work within the new paradigm.” Gordis, *Man and His World*, 73 stated with approval that there was a growing recognition for the essential unity of Ecclesiastes, but

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The challenge to read Ecclesiastes as a unity, however, has been forcefully made by Bartholomew in his revised dissertation *Reading Ecclesiastes: Old Testament Exegesis and Hermeneutical Theory*.²⁰ His argument suggests that the foundations of the historical-critical paradigm are increasingly being challenged for its pride of place in the world of biblical scholarship. The historic assumptions that have given rise to much of the more serious diachronic barbarism of the texts of the Hebrew Bible now often seem out of place. Culture, more broadly, and biblical scholarship, more specifically, have challenged individuals and structures that seek to speak a singularly definitive answer to the question of meaning. The current trend is to allow a pluralism of readings, but at the same time to maintain points of intersection so that dialogue between different readings are possible. The reading he espouses, at least for those who engage the text religiously,²¹ is to take the unity of Ecclesiastes seriously and to be permitted to read it within a tradition.

It is sometimes unclear whether Bartholomew advocates that Ecclesiastes *is* a unified composition or whether one has the right to read it as a unified composition, but others have forcefully argued that it should be read as a compositional whole. Longman, relying on the similarity between fictional Akkadian autobiography and the book of Ecclesiastes,²² suggests that the Qoheleth material is a separate literary piece, but that the prologue (1:1-11) and the epilogue (12:8-14) work together with the autobiography to form a unified work.²³

Both Longman and Bartholomew pay tribute to the remarkable study of Fox that serves as a gathering point for those who seek to read Ecclesiastes as a unified work, tensions and all. Fox, who is intimately familiar with historical-critical methodology, nevertheless rejects the attempts of earlier critics to parcel Ecclesiastes

also allowed that “Only the Epilogue (12:9-14), which speaks of Koheleth in the third person and reflects a conventional and partly critical attitude toward Koheleth, is manifestly from another hand.” That he feels no need to defend his decision to separate 12:9-14 from the rest is clear from 349: “Hence the contradiction between the sentiments expressed in vv. 13f. and the rest of the book needs no explanation, and the various efforts to harmonize them are uncalled for.”

²⁰ Craig G. Bartholomew, *Reading Ecclesiastes: Old Testament Exegesis and Hermeneutical Theory*, AnBib 139 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute Press, 1998).

²¹ In his case, as a Christian.

²² See his Tremper Longman III, *Fictional Akkadian Autobiography* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1991).

²³ Tremper Longman III, *The Book of Ecclesiastes*, NICOT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 21. He also acknowledges in n. 75 that it is possible that the frame narrator created Qoheleth himself.

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into redacted sources. Instead, he argues in his 1977 article “Frame-Narrative and Composition in the Book of Qohelet” that Ecclesiastes can and should be read as a unified composition. The appearances of *verbum dicendi* at 1:2, 7:27, and 12:8 are key to this analysis. According to Fox, there is no reason whatsoever for a traditional editor to place the *verbum dicendi* in 7:27, and so reveals the presence of an author rather than an editor.²⁴ As he goes on clearly to state, “That certain words are in a different voice does not mean that they are by a different hand...I suggest that all of 1:2-12:14 is by the same hand—not that the epilogue is by Qohelet, but that *Qohelet* is “by” the epilogist.”²⁵

A unified composition, however, must still account for the tensions and contradictions that readers perceive in the work. While one can claim that these tensions form part of the very fabric of the work, is it enough to suggest that “Qohelet is not so much contradicting himself as *observing* contradictions in the world...He does not resolve these antinomies, but only describes them, bemoans them, and suggests how to live in such a refractory world”?²⁶ Is the purpose of Ecclesiastes only to make the contradictions known rather than offering a way to understand them? What is at the heart of the conflict? If the source of the conflict in the Qoheleth material could be exposed, then the results could be brought into conversation with the material of the frame-narration as a means of examining the holistic claim. It would also provide an opportunity for comparison with other works in the Hebrew Bible and in extra-biblical works.

We suggest in this project that a sustained interaction with the theme of time in Ecclesiastes reveals the source of the conflicts and tensions. Ecclesiastes creates the tensions by the manner in which it characterizes time, and this characterization is consistent both with the prologue and the epilogue. An extended engagement with the juxtaposition of situations and events that are immediate with those that are more

²⁴ Michael V. Fox, “Frame Narrative and Composition in the Book of Qohelet,” *HUCA* 48 (1977): 85.

²⁵ We accept here the central tenants of the literary approach to Ecclesiastes whereby it stands as the work of one author who takes on the persona of Qoheleth, the royal sage, beginning in 1:12. One item that does not receive attention in the literature of Ecclesiastes is the use of the first person suffix in 1:11, *מל פננו*. It is the only use of the first person suffix in Ecclesiastes and we would argue that it indicates that 1:1-11 along with 12:8-14 should be viewed as the persona of the narrator who “records” the words of Qoheleth for his child/student. The words of Qoheleth himself begin in 1:12 and continue to 12:7.

²⁶ Michael V. Fox, *A Time to Tear Down and a Time to Build Up : a rereading of Ecclesiastes* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 3.

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distant creates the conflict within the character Qoheleth and accounts for much of what has been seen as contradictory elements within the book.

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A great deal of attention has been paid to the rhetoric of Ecclesiastes as a function of its overall structure and movement.²⁷ The most recent of such works is Kamano's 2001 work, which pays careful attention to the overall pedagogy of Ecclesiastes based on a close examination of its structure. Kamano suggests that the twin poems of 1:3-11 and 3:1-8 form two poles of Qoheleth's cosmology whereby 1:3-11 suggests cosmic stability within the constantly changing environment of life (3:1-8).²⁸ Qoheleth's personal *ethos* is at the heart of his appeal to listen to his voice as a way of navigating through the challenges this cosmology provides.

Kamano's work continues the work of others who have suggested that within the opening chapters of Ecclesiastes one encounters programmatic ideas that the remainder of the work addresses. If the programmatic ideas and questions that give shape to the remainder of the work are found within the first three chapters, it is evident that time must factor keenly into the central concern of the work. For example, the programmatic question of 1:3 is a question intimately related to the

²⁷ Kamano includes Graham S. Ogden, "The 'Better'-Proverbs (Tôb-Spruch), Rhetorical Criticism, and Qoheleth," *JBL* 96 (1977): 489-505; Franz Josef Backhaus, "Denn Zeit und Zufall trifft sie alle": *Studien zur Komposition und zum Gottesbild im Buch Qohelet*, BBB 83 (Frankfurt am Main: Anton Hain, 1993); Raymond Eugene Johnson, "The Rhetorical Question as a Literary Device in Ecclesiastes" (Th.D, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1986); Douglas B. Miller, "The Symbolic Function of Hebel in the Book of Ecclesiastes" (Ph.D, Princeton Theological Seminary, 1996) subsequently published as Miller, *Symbol and Rhetoric*; Fox, "Frame-Narrative"; Diethelm Michel, *Untersuchungen zur Eigenart des Buches Qohelet*, BZAW 183 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1989) in his survey of recent works on the rhetoric of Ecclesiastes.

²⁸ Kamano, *Cosmology*, 25 depending upon H. Gese, "The Crisis of Wisdom in Kohaleth," in *Theodicy in the Old Testament*, ed. James L. Crenshaw, IRT 4 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 147-48. Gese holds that in early wisdom there was a unity between act-characterization-consequence, but that Ecclesiastes reflects a break in this characterization. Gese advocates that the previous notions of being "righteous" and "wicked" were no longer operative as a "foundation of a real possibility for decision making" due to the severing of cause and effect (145). Gese suggests that in place of this cause and effect, Ecclesiastes represents a new way of thinking about the world not based on human activity but some "absolute, objective order" (147). The poems of 1:3-11 and 3:1-15 describe this order as "eternal sameness" (1:3-11) and the "eternal fluxation [sic] of the right time (3:1-15)" (148). The breakdown Gese suggests is only partial, however, for the Qoheleth material still characterizes people as "wicked," "righteous," "wise," and "fool" so that there was still some unity between act-characterization. It is only the break between characterization and consequence that represents a development, which raises the interesting question of the standard Qoheleth utilizes to adjudicate "wicked" and "righteous" when it is no longer the result of one's life. To maintain the categories, even more emphasis is placed on adjudicating the actions that result in act-characterization.

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passing of time: what is the reward of a lifetime of toil? The verses that follow consider the movement of natural phenomena, which is experienced from the human perspective as the passing of time. Utilizing sixteen²⁹ participles in 1:4-7, the opening poem depicts the status of humanity (v. 4a) and God's creation (vv. 4b-7) as being constantly in motion.³⁰ This constant motion does not lead to any final destination, however. Everything continues in balance. The participles, in this case, act to convey the movement of time just as the perfective and imperfective conjugations may be used to convey time. The final pronouncement of the opening section furthers this judgment declaring that there is nothing new for human beings to experience and that in time previous generations will be forgotten (1:10-11).

On the other side of the introductory chapters, the best-known passage from Ecclesiastes (3:1-8) addresses the activity of human life as a function of its time/timing. These temporal concerns are not isolated in the first eight verses as the remainder of the chapter examines the value of a lifetime of toil (3:9), the relation of human action in the light of the time of God (v. 11), the repetitiveness of human experience over time (v. 15), and the inability to look beyond one's own lifetime to what will be (v. 22). This programmatic section of Ecclesiastes begins and ends with temporal ideas, and in between Qoheleth reflects upon his own experiences over a lifetime. Temporal themes are intricately woven into the larger discussion of life's meaning and purpose in Ecclesiastes.

The ideas of Ecclesiastes are visible in its vocabulary, for as Schoors remarks, "The highly reflective and even philosophical character of the Book of

²⁹ MT reads a Qal perfect at the beginning of v. 5 (קָרַן), but it may be preferable to view this as a participle (as BHK), though the metathesis of the ך as suggested by BHS is not necessary (see Thomas Krüger, *Qoheleth: A Commentary*, ed. Klaus Baltzer, trans. O.C. Dean Jr. Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 47n.5a.). Longman accepts the recommendation of BHS (Longman III, *Ecclesiastes*, 60n.15.) and the BHQ concurs.

³⁰ W-O §37.1d-f takes issue with A.B. Davidson's characterization of participles as presenting a "continuous exercise or exhibition of the action or condition denoted by the verb" (A.B. Davidson, *Hebrew Syntax*, 3d. ed (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1901), §97). This has been subsequently softened in Gibson's edition to read, "In many contexts and with suitable verbs it implies continuity, but this is not a necessary part of its meaning" (John C.L. Gibson, *Davidson's introductory Hebrew grammar: syntax*, 4th. ed. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), §110). W-O distinguishes four usages of the participle—substantive, adjectival, relative, predicate—and indicates that the "characterization of the participle as denoting unbroken aspect is true only in the case of the participle's almost purely verbal use as predicative." What we find in 1:4-7 are predicative uses of the participle (e.g., W-O §37.6.e.25), and so we have this durative temporality as part of the function. See also J-M §121a,c.

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Qohelet finds expression in its typical vocabulary.”³¹ It is significant, then, that there are a number of temporal lexemes utilized in Ecclesiastes including including דור, עולם, זכר, זכרון, יום, זמן, שנה, and עת among others, and that these lexemes occur in every chapter in Ecclesiastes. Two of these lexemes, עת and יום, have an absolute occurrence (40 and 26 respectively) that ranks them among the top 15 lexically significant words in Ecclesiastes.³²

Stand-alone words with direct time reference, however, are not the only measure of the importance of time. The oft-used phrase “under the sun” (הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ תַּחַת) includes both a physical location (i.e. on earth—1:14; 3:16; 6:12) but also relates to human lifetime and achievement (e.g., 1:3; 2:20; 9:6), and thus becomes intimately connected with time. Time, whether encountered through noun, expression, or verb, forms an important part of Ecclesiastes worthy of greater consideration.³³

Investigations of Time

It is an intimidating task to construct a project on a work that quite rightly points out that there is no end to the task of making books. There are already many investigations of time in the Hebrew Bible and Ecclesiastes. The methodologies, results, and audiences for these studies vary considerably, but each is united by the fact that an understanding of how time is expressed forms a central component of the reader’s ability to successfully interpret a written work. Here we will merely survey a few prominent works in order to highlight the unique contribution of this study.

H. Wheeler Robinson’s posthumous work *Inspiration and Revelation in the Old Testament* includes a chapter on time in the Hebrew Bible with a special

³¹ Antoon Schoors, “Words Typical of Qohelet,” in *Qoheleth in the Context of Wisdom*, ed. Antoon Schoors, BETL 136 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1998), 39.

³² By lexically significant words we refer to words other than prepositions and conjunctions that carry the meaning of a sentence.

³³ While we appreciate the sentiments of Rachel Z. Dulin, “‘How Sweet Is the Light’: Qoheleth’s Age-Centered Teachings,” *Int* 55 (2001): 261 who suggests that “age and the imprint of time constitute the very core of his teachings,” it is not age that is at the core but the movement of time more generally. Humans may respond to time via the process of aging, but aging is hardly the chief concern of the work as a whole. The concluding poem may have this trajectory, but this is not a source of firm agreement and the theme of aging only appears in this section. However, she is quite right to point out the core of Qoheleth’s teaching lay in the exploration of time.

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appendix on “The Time Consciousness of Koheleth.”³⁴ Robinson takes special note of both עת and עולם. In both cases, Robinson argues that the Hebrew people understood time according to the content of its events and goes so far as to say that the Hebrews did not show much “mathematical or philosophical interest” in time.³⁵ In making this statement, of course, Robinson would exclude Ecclesiastes from consideration given that the time consciousness in Ecclesiastes is “as un-Hebraic as we should expect to find in a book from which the sense of history is absent...His time-consciousness, therefore, is useful as a check on that of the Old Testament in general, by its very unlikeness to this.” The difficulty of Robinson’s position lies in his reliance on the small number of texts in the Hebrew Bible. On the basis of primarily religious texts, he makes the sweeping generalization that the Hebrew people did not have an interest in philosophical or mathematical considerations of time. Based on the texts we possess, however, it would appear ancient Israel did not entertain a philosophical or mathematical consideration of anything.

At the same time, Robinson draws on an insight from Orelli that larger stretches of time are understood through the compilation of smaller spans of time.³⁶ This relation of event to perpetuity is acutely felt in Ecclesiastes, and Robinson is quite right that while other works may express a “transcendence of time in religious experience,”³⁷ there is a definite lack of transcendence in Ecclesiastes. Ecclesiastes focuses upon the events of life and the connection of these events over large spans of time, as we shall demonstrate. It is questionable, however, to speak of this as un-Hebraic, but instead to allow that we lack sufficient literary data from different areas of ancient Israelite life to make this judgement. People who share a common language need not conceptualize life the same way through that language. This would be to deny the possibility of language developing and shifting over time.

While not the first to contemplate how the Hebrew Bible expresses time, James Barr’s *Biblical Words for Time* is a momentous work in method and

³⁴ H. Wheeler Robinson, *Inspiration and Revelation in the Old Testament* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1946) with Appendix B on p. 121.

³⁵ Robinson, *Inspiration and Revelation*, 112.

³⁶ Robinson, *Inspiration and Revelation*, 119 drawing on Conrad von Orelli, *Die hebräischen Synonyma der Zeit und Ewigkeit genetisch und sprachvergleichend dargestellt* (Leipzig: A. Lorentz, 1871), 100.

³⁷ Robinson, *Inspiration and Revelation*, 120.

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methodology with temporal vocabulary at its core.³⁸ Barr does not undertake an extended investigation of the time words themselves, but throws down a methodological gauntlet at those who would seek to capture the worldview of the ancient Hebrews (or early Christians) through the use of language.

The focus of the work itself may not be toward an understanding of time, but Barr does make a number of relevant observations regarding time in Ecclesiastes. His characterization of Ecclesiastes recognizes that temporality is central to the work, which he characterizes as the “stultifying and frustrating effect of time and change upon human effort.”³⁹ In fact, Eccl 9:11 is one verse that Barr muses may in fact represent a reflection using **זמן** as “time in general” without resorting to time solely defined by its content.⁴⁰

However, Barr’s contribution in *Biblical Words* is certainly methodological and his warning serves to inform any investigation of time. Arguments based primarily on lexical data suffer because of “the very serious shortage within the Bible of the kind of *actual statement* about ‘time’ or ‘eternity’ which could form a sufficient basis for a Christian philosophical-theological view of time. It is the lack of actual statements about what time is like, more than anything else, that has forced exegetes into trying to get a view of time out of the *words* themselves.”⁴¹ An investigation such as the one we are undertaking here is well-served by these methodological insights.

John Wilch’s study, *Time and Event*, enters the discussion of the concept of time in the Hebrew Bible through the detailed study of one term, **זמן**, in order to determine whether there was a core of consistent usage.⁴² While appreciating the time studies of the past, Wilch suggests that in light of Barr’s criticisms in *Biblical Words*, the study of temporal vocabulary should be re-opened with a focus on exegetical explorations of the biblical texts rather than by reference to etymological studies.

³⁸ James Barr, *Biblical Words for Time*, SBT 33 (London: SCM Press, 1962).

³⁹ Barr, *Biblical Words for Time*, 98.

⁴⁰ Unlike, for example Robinson, *Inspiration and Revelation in the Old Testament*, 109 whom Barr critiques for suggesting “that the Hebrew mind conceives time in the concrete, in its filled content, and not as an abstract idea.”

⁴¹ Barr, *Biblical Words for Time*, 131.

⁴² John R. Wilch, *Time and Event* (Leiden: Brill, 1969).

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Wilch's investigation uncovers that in the majority of cases, *תָּע* refers to a definite occasion rather than a strict duration of time. It "does not always refer to the temporal aspect of an occasion" and when it does "it often is not primarily related to the temporality *but to a certain quality or peculiarity*."⁴³ In particular reference to Ecclesiastes, Wilch disagrees with Robinson's assessment that Ecclesiastes' view of time is unique, as Wilch finds that the use of *תָּע* corresponds with its usual usage elsewhere.⁴⁴ Wilch suggests that any unique usage may occur within chapters 3 and 8. Through the exploration of 3:1-8, Wilch suggests that the use of predicate constructions with the infinitives purposefully obscures the subject thereby giving the impression that these events happen to, rather than are carried out by, humans.⁴⁵ In this emphasis, Wilch sees Qoheleth advocating an "occasion-when" rather than a "time for," which pushes the reader towards passive acceptance as a means of finding joy and a peaceful path. Thus, the main point of Qoheleth developed in the first two chapters and then expanded in the next ten is humanity's general failure by seeking to "structure his life according to his own imagination instead of according to the possible situations that are given to him."⁴⁶

Wilch's exploration is valuable as a wider-ranging investigation into the exegetical use of a single word in its various semantic domains. As an investigation of time in Ecclesiastes, however, it opens a door on an examination that it does not walk through. What is the conceptual worldview presented in Ecclesiastes from which an exhortation for passive acceptance of events springs? While Wilch comes to his conclusion through an investigation of time, he does not proceed to suggest that it is precisely the structure of time in Ecclesiastes that permits and, in fact, advocates for the passive acceptance of events. We suggest that a more thorough investigation into the presentation of time in Ecclesiastes provides the means to answer this question.

Snaith's exploration of time in the Hebrew Bible is also framed in light of Barr's critiques as it avoids a lexical/etymological approach and instead opts for an

⁴³ Wilch, *Time and Event*, 33.

⁴⁴ Wilch, *Time and Event*, 118.

⁴⁵ Wilch, *Time and Event*, 118-19.

⁴⁶ Wilch, *Time and Event*, 124.

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approach carried out “topologically.”⁴⁷ Snaith systematizes the portrayal of time in the Hebrew Bible into the categories of Circular Time, Horizontal Time, and Vertical Time, whereby circular time derives from association with the natural world and agricultural concerns, while horizontal time is evident from the sequential representation of time pinned to unique events and people such as the regal dating system of Kings or the reference to “two years before the earthquake.” Snaith suggests both of these views are common conceptual fixtures for time in the ancient and modern worlds. The unique contribution of the biblical literature, however, is the vertical element of time, which references “God’s involvement with the world and with men.”⁴⁸ The contention is that the biblical literature re-formulates the circular and horizontal dimensions of time to accommodate the in-breaking of God expressed as vertical time.

Snaith’s study is valuable in two ways. First, it demonstrates that time need not be formulated as a singular concept within the Hebrew Bible but that the expression of time has various dimensions and means of expression. Second, Snaith reminds us that the investigation of time is not limited to a strict study of the lexemes of time, but can be approached topically looking at the confluence of vocabulary and conceptual metaphors in literature. One is able to approach a body of literature, whether as broad as the Hebrew Bible or as narrow as Ecclesiastes, inquiring after the patterns of expression that one can connect with the detectable manifestations of time.

Along with the general investigations of time, there have been specific investigations of time in Ecclesiastes. Michael V. Fox’s 1998 article entitled “Time in Qohelet’s ‘Catalogue of Times’” investigates the sense of the lexeme עֵת in 3:1-9.⁴⁹ Fox acknowledges that his study of עֵת in 3:1-9 cannot be extrapolated to the work as a whole, yet he does make valuable contributions toward the understanding of time more generally in Ecclesiastes. Using the materials of Pedersen⁵⁰ and

⁴⁷ Norman Henry Snaith, “Time in the Old Testament,” in *Promise and Fulfilment: essays presented to S.H. Hooke in celebration of his ninetieth birthday*, ed. F.F. Bruce (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1979), 175. Snaith suggests, however, that Barr’s critiques of Robinson set up a straw man with three or four examples rather than proposing a strong argument against all the examples, which may, in fact, follow the division of “chronological time” and “opportune time” more closely.

⁴⁸ Snaith, “Time in the Old Testament,” 181.

⁴⁹ Michael V. Fox, “Time in Qohelet’s ‘Catalogue of Times’,” *JNSL* 24 (1998): 25-39.

⁵⁰ J. Pedersen, *Israel: its life and culture* (Copenhagen: Branner, 1926).

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Boman,⁵¹ both of whom recognized that the Hebrews sometimes viewed time by its content, Fox proposes a more developed scheme of time whereby it can be either temporally defined (duration) or substantively defined (related to particular events).⁵² Fox then applies this scheme to the poem of 3:1-8 concluding that the strong determinism that some commentators detect in 3:1-8 is not present.⁵³ “The Catalogue speaks about the *right* times, the circumstances when, in the proper course of events, something should happen or be done. But these are not the times when things will inevitably occur.”⁵⁴ The most telling example for Fox is the first pair of the Catalogue, “being born”–“dying.” The time of dying, for Fox, cannot mean the time when anyone dies, nor can it indicate that God chooses this moment to cause death, otherwise statements such as 7:17 regarding dying “before your time” would make little sense. Rather, the “time to die” is the right moment for death as determined by the course of life and the natural wearing out of the body rather than by the will of human beings (e.g., murder, suicide) or the determination of God.⁵⁵

Fox notes that the “right time” is a part of other uses of עת as well, such as 3:17 where God, “will judge the righteous and the wicked, for he has appointed a time for every matter, and for every work.” For Fox, this “time” is the proper time for judgement from the position of the deity, which Qoheleth confesses is beyond him. Nevertheless, Qoheleth confesses that there will be a time for judgement, and it will be the “right time” even though, “as Qoheleth quickly recognizes, what is the right time for God may be too late for man.”⁵⁶

Fox’s article provides a close examination not only of the Catalogue of times, but a conceptualization of the multiple nuances a pregnant term such as “time” may

⁵¹ Thorleif Boman, *Hebrew thought compared with Greek* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960).

⁵² Fox, “Qohelet’s ‘Catalogue of Times’,” 27-28. These he further divides into unique and periodic with respect to temporally defined time, and actual occurrence and configuration of circumstances for substantively defined time.

⁵³ Fox mentions Choon-Leong Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, AB 18C (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1997), 170 and Roland E. Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, ed. David A. Hubbard, John D.W. Watts, and Ralph P. Martin, WBC 23A (Dallas: Word, 1992), 31 as representative examples, but see also Antoon Schoors, “Theodicy in Qohelet,” in *Theodicy in the world of the Bible*, ed. Antti Laato and Johannes C. de Moor (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 385 who argues that Qoheleth is certainly a determinist.

⁵⁴ Fox, “Qohelet’s ‘Catalogue of Times’,” 29.

⁵⁵ Fox, “Qohelet’s ‘Catalogue of Times’,” 35. Fox’s conclusion of the matter is well put: “...the times in the Catalogue are not predestined, since man may overlook them and God can override them” (36).

⁵⁶ Fox, “Qohelet’s ‘Catalogue of Times’,” 39.

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have in a given context. A lexeme for time may not only have a temporal dimension, but also can occur with reference to content. In the expression, “It is time to read Ecclesiastes,” this time is defined by its content. This is opposed to, “At this time, we will read Ecclesiastes,” which refers to a particular chronological sequence of time regardless of the activity taking place within it. It would have been “this time” even without the act reading. Time is not merely chronological, though this is always an important dimension to the expression of time.

Other studies that claim to examine time in Ecclesiastes share Fox’s focus on the third chapter. Jacob Chamakkala’s article, “Qoheleth’s Reflections on Time” focuses exclusively on 3:1-15. As a result of his exegetical investigation of this one section, Chamakkala is able to ascertain that “Qoheleth’s reflections on time, thus attest a marked difference from the rest of the Old Testament.”⁵⁷ But can one speak of Qoheleth’s reflections on time from only a brief investigation of one part of one chapter? Lohfink’s article is similarly limited in scope, though it attempts to bring together the insights from the poem of 3:2-8 into conversation with the poem from 1:4-11 as a way of addressing the connectedness between moments and eternity.⁵⁸ While these two articles consider the features of time in Ecclesiastes, their limited scope and ability to address the full extent of time in Ecclesiastes makes us aware of the need for a more comprehensive study.

One of the most extensive recent time studies is Davis Thekkekara’s 2004 dissertation entitled “The Concept of Time in the Book of Qoheleth.” This work, too, is limited in scope as Thekkekara considers Eccl 3:1 as central for an understanding of time in Ecclesiastes as a whole.⁵⁹ Particularly important for Thekkekara is the phrase *עַתָּה לְכָל־חַפֵּץ* (“a time for every matter”) given that it occurs in two other contexts (3:17; 8:6). Since 3:1 represents the first use of the phrase, and is the title of the unit spanning 3:1-15, it is central to Qoheleth’s presentation of time. Thekkekara devotes a great deal of space toward developing word studies on the central lexemes in 3:1 including *עַתָּה*, *זְמַן*, *חַפֵּץ*, and *כָּל*. From this he develops the thesis that *עַתָּה* has the sense of “appointed time” based on the

⁵⁷ Jacob Chamakkala, “Qoheleth’s Reflections on Time,” *Jeevadhara* 7 (1977): 131.

⁵⁸ Norbert Lohfink, “The Present and Eternity: Time in Qoheleth,” *TD* 34 (1987): 236-40.

⁵⁹ Davis Thekkekara, *The Concept of Time in the Book of Qoheleth: An Exegetical and Theological Study Toward the Interpretation of Qoheleth 3,1* (Rome: Pontificia Univ. Urbaniana, 2004).

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dual notions that it stands in parallel with זמן, which he claims always has the sense of appointed time,⁶⁰ and that 3:11 points to every עת as established by God. As a result, 3:1-8 must be read as God's times rather than human time.⁶¹ His conclusion is that 3:1-8 demonstrates the existence of a divinely appointed time for every activity and human beings stand powerless in the face of this divine determinism.⁶²

There are two serious difficulties with Thekkekara's approach. The first is the use of 3:11 as the means by which to understand 3:1-8. While others see 3:11 as advocating determinacy,⁶³ Thekkekara's willingness to read 3:1-8 through the determinacy of 3:11 creates the problem of seeing how a pre-determined time to sew, tear, gather or scatter stones, or any of the other particularly human activities of 3:2-8, functions. He never adequately addresses this problem. His connection between 3:11 and vv. 1-8 appears to fit due to the use of עת, but it does not stand the scrutiny of application to the particulars of the list. Second, from a methodological point of view, he takes the unfortunate step of exploring the vocabulary of Ecclesiastes first in the Hebrew Bible, including through the etymology of nouns, and then applying these ideas to Ecclesiastes in particular. In this way, he does not allow that the usage in Ecclesiastes could be unique or even counter-intuitive when used in its context.

The previous investigations of time we have summarized have examined the nature of time in the Hebrew Bible as a whole or Ecclesiastes in particular. These studies are valuable inasmuch as they have considered the philosophical and conceptual framework of time (e.g., how did the ancient Israelites view time?) or the view of time in Ecclesiastes (i.e., how did Qoheleth present time) with special emphasis on those passages where time appears to be the central issue, such as 3:1-15. What remains to be attempted, however, is to use the examination of time in Ecclesiastes as a reading strategy for the entire work. Once a view of time is established, how does this view of time assist us as a reader to approach the difficult, contradictory, or unusual wisdom of Qoheleth? Can an exploration of time help

⁶⁰ Thekkekara, *The Concept of Time*, 80.

⁶¹ Thekkekara, *The Concept of Time*, 35.

⁶² Thekkekara, *The Concept of Time*, 118.

⁶³ This is also expressed by James L. Crenshaw, "The Eternal Gospel (Eccl. 3:11)," in *Essays in Old Testament Ethics: Festschrift for J.P. Hyatt*, ed. James L. Crenshaw and John T. Willis (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1974), 34-35 who sees that the section of 3:1-15 "laments the pre-determined monotony of all human affairs [and] the veil of secrecy [that] hangs over everything that happens."

account for the contradictory elements in the work as a whole? These larger questions occupy the central place in this study.

Synopsis of the Investigation

The study proceeds in two parts. The entry-point for the exploration of time in Ecclesiastes comes through the exegetical study of words. The examination of the vocabulary used to express time becomes a means of uncovering how time presents itself to the reader. Part One will examine this temporal vocabulary in two sections. First, an exploration of the two most frequently used nouns used to express time, עת and יום, form the basis for chapter two. The examination of these lexemes will consider the use of the lexeme in its context toward an overall understanding of the passage in which the lexeme occurs. It is not intended to propose a definition of the lexeme but its contribution to its context. We will demonstrate that within its contexts in Ecclesiastes, עת does not frequently, if ever, carry the sense of “appointed time” or “proper time” but rather occurs with events and situations that are of limited and episodic duration. In Ecclesiastes, the notion that events are bounded is both positive, in the sense that abuses are limited, and negative, in the sense that time-boundedness affects the ability of humans to attempt anything lasting and enduring. The second chapter also goes on to examine יום, which we show has a range of uses within its various constructions. This word is used flexibly and in its uses, especially in the plural, it expresses more generally the notion of time as a container in which a number of other events and circumstances take place.

Chapter three turns to consider less frequent temporal lexemes including יור, זכרון/זכר, שנה, and עולם. The first three items are familiar temporal terms included, for example, in Brin’s *The Concept of Time in the Bible and the Dead Sea Scrolls*.⁶⁴ We justify including the pair זכרון/זכר by the proximity of these lexemes to other temporal lexemes identified for study. Further, as we will demonstrate, memory plays an important role in the overall temporal scheme of Ecclesiastes. The investigation of these lexemes will confirm the results of the investigation of עת and יום above, which is the frequent shift in Ecclesiastes between speaking of present circumstances driven by a concern for individual events

⁶⁴ We have not, however, explored prepositional expressions formed with, for example, לפני or אחר, though these certainly could have been included as they are in Brin’s work. Rather, this study focused chiefly on nouns, with the exception of the זכרון/זכר tandem.

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to a panoramic view of life as a whole or, in the cases of זכרון and עולם, a much greater span of time. The cognizance of these temporal horizons opens the way for the second half of the project, which is an investigation of how Ecclesiastes moves back and forth between references to near temporal events to distant temporal events that we have named horizons.

Part Two, consisting of chapters four through six, examines the presence and use of these temporal horizons in a reading of Ecclesiastes. One can define a temporal horizon partially on the vocabulary use, but more specifically on the topological outlook of a phrase or sentence that contains a given temporal word. Qoheleth's description that he "made great works; I built houses and planted vineyards for myself" focuses upon specific events within Qoheleth's life. However, when he reveals, "For there is no enduring remembrance of the wise or of fools," he is not considering an event but a long duration of time. We suggest that if temporal horizons were an important feature of Ecclesiastes, it would reveal itself in the double introduction to the work in 1:2-11 (frame narrator) and 1:12-2:26 (Qoheleth). The fourth chapter demonstrates that this temporal movement does exist, that it can be identified, and that it is useful to observe the changes in horizons as these are read side-by-side and in light of one another.

The fifth chapter then takes three of the categories developed through the reading of the dual introductions and examines the remaining material in Ecclesiastes through these lenses. The first three categories deal with the longest durations of time, which we will christen *nature's time*, *generation time* and *lifespan time*.⁶⁵ While there are a number of generation reflections, nature's time occupies relatively little space in the overall narrative of Qoheleth, and we include in that category the works of God, which Qoheleth often confesses are rigid and fixed (e.g., 6:10). Lifespan reflections occupy much more space in the reflections of Qoheleth, and this chapter will observe the portrayal of lifespan time in both its positive and negative manifestations.

⁶⁵ Some credit must be given to the three volume work of Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer, 3 vols. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984-1988), who introduced this writer to the work of Braudel and the multi-layered investigation of history. Braudel's three layers of geo-political changes (*long durée*), the changes of economic life, and the events of history (*histoire événementielle*) was a helpful lens to consider time in Ecclesiastes. Helpful as well was the description of the *Annales* school in Matthias Middell, "The Annales," in *Writing History: Theory and Practice*, ed. Stefan Berger, Heiko Feldner, and Kevin Passmore (London: Arnold, 2003), 104-17.

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The sixth chapter examines the fourth horizon of time developed previously in chapter four: *event time*. The examination of verses and passages reflecting event time will demonstrate that Qoheleth portrays time as both positive and negative in order to exhort the reader toward behaviours fitting the main themes of profitability and enjoyment. We will also take the opportunity to examine the wisdom sayings of Ecclesiastes, defining wisdom as the ability to make appropriate choices in the moment of action. We contend that the vast majority of Qoheleth's sayings are directed at event time, and that the sayings point the reader toward success in the moment rather than suggesting any long-enduring benefit to wisdom. This re-appropriation of wisdom away from a means to obtain lifespan benefit and toward event time decision-making is the context into which to read the frame-narrator's encouragement to see Qoheleth as "being wise" and one who was able to teach the people, "knowledge, weighing and studying and arranging many proverbs." Rather than exhorting the reader to a sceptical view of the wisdom of Qoheleth (so Fox), the closing exhortation focuses the reader on the choices of the moment without promising lifespan time benefit. In this way, it fits harmoniously with the temporal scheme developed in the previous eleven and a half chapters.

It is fair to say that this project is not an exploration of "time" in Ecclesiastes as it is of "times," for as Gosden has aptly stated:

Life is not composed of one or two times, but many. Time, like space, is produced through all social practice. Time comes from everywhere and affects everything. Time has a special element, in that the places in which time is created affect the nature of time and the interaction of different times.⁶⁶

The contribution of Ecclesiastes to an understanding of time and times is not a definitive word, but a voice in the Hebrew Bible that challenges the reader to take stock of time not as a philosophical exercise, but as a means of practical theology through an exploration of what is, what was, and what can be.

⁶⁶ Christopher Gosden, *Social Being and Time*, Social Archaeology (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 126.

Part One: Key Words for Time in Ecclesiastes

Chapter Two: Most Frequent Words for Time

Introduction

We cannot attempt an exploration of time in Ecclesiastes apart from an understanding of the words that the writer employed to convey time. The study of words as a means to enter into the literary world created by a text is standard practice, and no less standard in the exploration of Ecclesiastes.¹ If the researcher is able to explore words that occur frequently, patterns in usage may become apparent or at least unlock avenues of further exploration.

The two most frequent time-related nouns, **יָמִים** and **עֵת**,² provide a sufficient entry-point into the world of the text. The word **עֵת** is the most frequent time-related noun in Ecclesiastes occurring a total of 40 times, though 3:1-8 contains the majority of its appearances.³ The lexeme **יָמִים** while having a lower number of absolute occurrences (26), is more widely distributed occurring in 8 of Ecclesiastes 12 chapters (i.e., 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11 and 12). In Schoors' exploration of some of the most frequent and widely-distributed lexemes in Ecclesiastes, including **אֶדָּם** (49 occurrences), **רָאָה** and **הָיָה** (47 each), **טוֹב** (45), **עָשָׂה** (44), **לֵב** (41), **אֵלֵּהִים** (40), and **הִבֵּל** (38), he suggests that these lexemes reveal the contours of Qoheleth's

¹ As an example, we can mention monographs and articles that are dedicated to the study of one of the key words in Qoheleth, **הִבֵּל**: William H.U. Anderson, "The Semantic Implications of **הִבֵּל** and **רָאָה** in the Hebrew Bible and for Qoheleth," *JNSL* 25 (1999): 59-73; Benjamin Lyle Berger, "Qohelet and the Exigencies of the Absurd," *BibInt* 9 (2001): 141-79; Michael V. Fox, "The Meaning of *hebel* for Qohelet," *JBL* 105 (1986): 409-27; Kit-Ching Ho, "Kohelet and 'futility' (*hebel*)," *Collectanea theologica Universitatis Fujen* 84 (1990): 229-36; John Jarick, "The Hebrew Book of Changes: Reflections on *hakkol hebel* and *lakkol zeman* in Ecclesiastes," *JSOT* 90 (2000): 79-99; Aarre Lauha, "Omnia Vanitas: Die Bedeutung von **הִבֵּל** bei Kohelet," in *Glaube und Gerechtigkeit: In Memoriam Rafael Gyllenberg*, ed. Jarmo Kiilunen, Vilho Riekkinen, and Heikki Räisänen, SESJ 38 (Helsinki: Suomen eksegetische seura, 1983), 19-25; Norbert Lohfink, "Ist Kohelets **הִבֵּל**-Aussage erkenntnistheoretisch gemeint?," in *Qohelet in the Context of Wisdom*, ed. Antoon Schoors, BETL 136 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1998), 41-59; Norbert Lohfink, "Zu **הִבֵּל** im Buch Kohelet," in *Studien zu Koheleth*, ed. Norbert Lohfink, SBAB 26 (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1998), 215-58; John E. McKenna, "The Concept of *hebel* in the Book of Ecclesiastes," *SJT* 45 (1992): 19-28; Douglas B. Miller, *Symbol and Rhetoric in Ecclesiastes: the place of 'Hebel' in Qohelet's work*, Academia Biblica 2 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002); Graham S. Ogden, "'Vanity' It Certainly is Not," *BT* 38 (1987): 301-07; Timothy Polk, "The Wisdom of Irony: A Study of *hebel* and Its Relation to Joy and the Fear of God in Ecclesiastes," *SBTh* 6 (1976): 3-17; Choon-Leong Seow, "Beyond Mortal Grasp: The Usage of *hebel* in Ecclesiastes," *AusBR* 48 (2000): 1-16. This is not to mention commentators who certainly discuss the meaning of **הִבֵּל** at some point in their commentaries.

² Hebrew will remain un-pointed unless necessary for its examination.

³ The first eight verses of chapter 3 host 29 uses, and it occurs in two other places in chapter 3 before reappearing 9 times in chapters 7-10.

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philosophical exploration in Ecclesiastes.⁴ One can see from these frequent terms themes that occupy a prominent position in Ecclesiastes: experience (רָאָה, הִיָּה, עָשָׂה, לָב), the relationship between God and humanity (אֱלֹהִים, אָדָם), and the search for meaning (טוֹב, הַבֵּל). We would argue that the number of occurrences and the distribution of time-related lexemes such as עַתָּה and יוֹם, suggests that time is also a key concern of Qoheleth's exploration.⁵

Time in Ecclesiastes, however, extends far beyond the reaches of עַתָּה and יוֹם. The investigation of words and expressions related to time will continue in chapter three. Though these expressions occur with less absolute occurrences, this does not indicate the relative unimportance of these lexemes. For example, the lexeme עוֹלָם, while only occurring seven times, is placed strategically two times each in the significant passages of Eccl 1 and 3. While this investigation begins with the most frequent time lexemes, the exploration of time in Ecclesiastes, and even of time's vocabulary in Ecclesiastes, lies far beyond the exploration of these two terms.

Considerations

It is necessary before proceeding with the investigation of lexemes in Ecclesiastes to consider a few underlying principles that give shape to the following chapters. This requires some exploration of current thinking on the sense of words (lexical semantics), and some of the pre-conceptions necessary to understand the sense of words in Ecclesiastes.

Words and Their Meaning

There are two levels at which one can speak of a word's "meaning/sense,"⁶ whether in a text or in spoken language. The first level of meaning is contextual

⁴ Antoon Schoors, "Words Typical of Qoheleth," in *Qoheleth in the Context of Wisdom*, ed. Antoon Schoors, BETL 136 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1998). Following Schoors' examination of some basic vocabulary in Qoheleth, he writes that "[i]t appears that Qoheleth seeks to attain to a critically sound vision (רָאָה) on everything that happens (הִיָּה), but always centered on human existence (אָדָם), i.e. everything that happens and is done is judged on its value for humanity and human beings individually (טוֹב). The fact that אֱלֹהִים, "God," is the next most frequent word shows that this philosophical preoccupation has a strong component of theodicy" (39).

⁵ The lexemes we have chosen to explore in chapters 2 and 3 occur over 80 times in Ecclesiastes, and in every chapter except four. The absence from chapter 4 is understandable given the proverbial nature of this material. Of the central words that Schoors examines, neither אָדָם nor לָב occur in chapter 4.

⁶ Technically, "meaning" can be "lexical," which involves issuing a definition encapsulating the breadth of the lexeme in question, or "contextual" where meaning is represented by a gloss or

meaning. In language, whether spoken or written, words appear in relationship to other words in the same linguistic context. For example, Qoheleth asks in 2:2 **וְלִשְׂמֹחָהּ מִהֲזֶה עֲשֵׂה**. Though the lexeme **זֶה** can refer to a plethora of different feminine objects, the context informs the reader that the feminine object in this case is the noun **שְׂמֹחָהּ**. This is contextual meaning at the level of syntax, but it is also possible that a word can have two different meanings in a different context. One could use as an example the lexeme **אֲרִיָּה/אֲרִי** (lion). In 2 Sam 23:20, the text lists some of the deeds of Beniah, son of Jehoida, one of the thirty of David. One of his exploits was to kill a lion (**אֲרִיָּה**), which in this context means to kill “a large carnivorous quadruped, *Felis leo*... of a tawny or yellowish brown colour, and having a tufted tail. The male is distinguished by a flowing shaggy mane.”⁷ Earlier, 2 Sam uses **אֲרִיָּה** very differently. In 17:10, Hashai’s advice to Absalom concerning David states: **וְהוּא גַם בֶּן חַיִּל אֲשֶׁר לִבּוֹ כְּלֵב הָאֲרִיָּה הַמָּס יִמָּס** (“Then even the valiant warrior, whose heart is like the heart of a lion, will utterly melt with fear”). The noun **אֲרִיָּה** occurs in both places, but while 23:20 has in mind the physical beast, chapter 17 only intends to pick up on the characteristics associated with lions; that is, strength and bravery. Here one encounters a difference between the plain meaning of the noun and the metaphorical association that provides a link between the characteristics of a lion and the characteristics of human beings.⁸

Context determines the meaning for every word employed in text or speech. This is not to deny, however, that words can have some sort of core meaning that it retains even when not used in a specific context. For example, entries in a dictionary have a meaning or meanings even though the context is a list of words that are not in syntactical arrangement with one another. It may be argued, however, that entries in the dictionary have descriptive meanings (i.e. meanings are listed based on their use, hence context, and the dictionary entries essentially list the usual contexts in which a

translation equivalent (Johannes P. Louw, “How Do Words Mean – If They Do?” *Filologia Neotestamentaria* 8 (1991): 125-26). We will use “meaning” in the sense of “contextual meaning” with a view to how the context limits the contextual meaning from what could be considered its broader lexical meaning. Alternatively, we will use the “sense” (of the lexeme) to describe this contextualization.

⁷ Oxford English Dictionary Online (1989), s.v. “Lion.”

⁸ For a full discussion of lion imagery in the Hebrew Bible and the ancient Near East, see Brent A. Strawn, *What Is Stronger Than a Lion? Leonine Image and Metaphor in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East*, OBO 212 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2005), 48.

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word is employed).⁹ While this is indeed the case in most instances, there is a certain sense where usage has led words to have a fixed range of meanings so that usages in contexts that do not fit the normal pattern of usage would appear strange. Thus, upon hearing the sentence, “The dog jumped into my lap and began to purr,” anyone familiar with the English language and animal behaviour would immediately detect the incongruence. Either this is a very special dog whose behaviour is widely out of sorts with canine ability, or the speaker has mistakenly used *dog* where *cat* is meant. Thus, *dog* has a certain meaning, which one can define negatively by stating that a dog does not purr, and a dog is not a cat. Societies, through long history of usage, have given words discrete pockets of meaning that the word now retains even without an immediate linguistic context.

The second layer of meaning, whose investigation is not the purpose of the present study except as it helps determine contextual meaning, is lexical meaning. Lexical meaning(s) is/are the core description(s) of a word. As Louw points out, too often lexical meaning is confused with the “glosses” provided in dictionaries.¹⁰ Since words in different languages, or even words in the same language thought of as synonyms, do not carry precisely the same meaning, it is not sufficient to provide a one-word gloss as a lexical meaning. Glosses are more appropriate for contextual, rather than lexical, meaning.

The Investigation of Words

The purpose of this chapter, and the next, will be to elucidate appropriate contextual meanings for the time words under consideration. Two points of method need to be clarified. First, the context of this investigation is a set of widening circles that encompasses the Hebrew language. The first and primary place of investigation will be within the Hebrew text of Ecclesiastes. In some cases where terms are numerous, such as with עַתָּה and יוֹם, the Hebrew text of Ecclesiastes itself will be sufficient to establish the contextual meaning since there are sufficient occurrences to provide a basis upon which to judge word usage. With other terms

⁹ Richard Hudson, *Word Meaning*, ed. Richard Hudson, Language Workbooks (London: Routledge, 1995), 31. According to the author, the purpose of a dictionary is to supply the facts/characteristics necessary to distinguish the sense of one word from the sense (meaning) of another word. The sense of a word is based on the network of other words with which it associates in language (44). Hence, the sense of a word derives from its usage, and it is this usage that the dictionary defines.

¹⁰ Louw, “How Do Words Mean,” 133.

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this may not be the case, and it will be necessary to explore the use of these terms in related Hebrew literature outside of Ecclesiastes.

The immediate circle outside Ecclesiastes will be with those works customarily designated as representing Late Biblical Hebrew.¹¹ This decision is not without controversy as the debate over the meaning of Late Biblical Hebrew rages. Does it represent a chronological development of the language that stands between CBH and Mishnaic Hebrew,¹² or does it represent a dialect of Hebrew that reflects, perhaps, regional variation?¹³ The larger question cannot be decided here, but it does weigh on the consideration of what other body of literature we may compare Ecclesiastes to in the consideration of its word usage. While it may be possible, as Young suggests, that the language of Ecclesiastes is unique conforming neither to CBH or LBH,¹⁴ it is still preferable to have a body of comparison. Young's own work suggests that Ecclesiastes does have a number of features that place it closer to

¹¹ Since the publication of Segal's *A Grammar of Mishnaic Hebrew* in 1927, the history of the Hebrew language has become a vibrant sub-discipline in its own right. In the 1970's a wealth of studies became available that paid attention to the development of the Hebrew language observed in the texts of the Hebrew Bible. Since the 1980's, it has become standard to refer to two different strands in Biblical Hebrew: Classical Biblical Hebrew (CBH) and Late Biblical Hebrew (LBH) (Ziony Zevit, "Introductory Remarks: Historical Linguistics and the Dating of Hebrew Texts ca. 1000-300 B.C.E.," *HS* 46 (2005): 321-26). While there may be wide scholarly consensus that this distinction can be made and should be made, there is far less consensus on what can be done with this information. The approach of Hurvitz (e.g., in Avi Hurvitz, "The Recent Debate on Late Biblical Hebrew: Solid Data, Experts' Opinions, and Inconclusive Arguments," *HS* 47 (2006): 191-210) has been to use the materials he feels quite certain to call either CBH or LBH as samples from which to extract statistical data to judge where other works in the Hebrew Bible fall on the spectrum between CBH and LBH. Others, such as Philip Davies ("Biblical Hebrew and the History of Ancient Judah: Typology, Chronology and Common Sense," in *Biblical Hebrew: studies in chronology and typology*, ed. Ian Young, JSOTSup 369 (T & T Clark International: London, 2003), 150-63) or Ian Young ("Can biblical texts be dated linguistically?," *HS* 46 (2005): 342-51) express strong reservations whether the data may be used in this way. For a fuller treatment of the larger scope of the changes in Hebrew from antiquity to the modern day see Eduard Yechezkel Kutscher, *A History of the Hebrew Language*, ed. Raphael Kutscher, (Leiden: Brill, 1982), or Angel Sáenz-Badillos, *A History of the Hebrew Language*, trans. John Elwolde (University of Cambridge Press: Cambridge, 1993).

¹² Since it is widely held that the language of pre-exilic to exilic Gen-2 Kgs provides examples of CBH while post-exilic Ezra-Nehemiah, Chronicles, Daniel and Esther represent LBH, the chronological development seems, at first glance, to be a way to account for the evidence. This distinction may be recognized not only by the changing vocabulary, but also by a distinction in syntax (Jan Joosten, "The Distinction Between Classical and Late Biblical Hebrew as Reflected in Syntax," *HS* 46 (2005): 327-39).

¹³ Ian Young, "What is 'Late Biblical Hebrew'?", in *A Palimpsest: Rhetoric, Ideology, Stylistics, and Language Relating to Persian Israel*, ed. Ehud Ben Zvi, Diana V. Edelman, and Frank Polak, Perspectives on Hebrew Scriptures and Its Contexts 5 (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2009), 263-64.

¹⁴ As does Ian Young, Robert Rezetko, and Martin Ehrensävård, *Linguistic Dating of Biblical Texts, Volume 2: A Survey of Scholarship, a New Synthesis and a Comprehensive Bibliography* (London: Equinox Publishing Ltd, 2008), 77.

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those that are designated LBH texts than those that are conventionally CBH.¹⁵ Coupled with Schoors' detailed examination of the grammar of Ecclesiastes from which he determines that Ecclesiastes is representative of those works considered LBH,¹⁶ this corpus of literature is a fitting place to begin the examination of lexemes when further material outside of Ecclesiastes is required.¹⁷ If necessary, the circle will be expanded further to the whole of the biblical Hebrew corpus, material in the Dead Sea Scrolls, and then Mishnaic Hebrew.¹⁸ This study seeks to remain within the corpus of the Hebrew Bible unless references to other materials seem essential. Language is one, but only one, factor in the investigation of contextual sense in this study.

The second factor is the method to ascertain sense. Here one must observe the semantic field of the term chosen, and ascertain what a word contributes to the context that even a word of similar sense does not. For example, 3:1 introduces the reader to two terms often translated as "time": עת and זמן. It is only עת that continues in usage while זמן is not utilized again. What does the continued use of עת help us to understand about this term in Ecclesiastes? On the other hand, both עת and יום occur frequently, and sometimes in a similar context (e.g., 8:6-8; 9:7-10). But what do each of these terms contribute that the other does not? In order to ascertain these nuances, it will be necessary to look at all the occurrences of the word, observe its syntactical usage, observe the words and concepts it is found in context with, and, since we are dealing with at least some poetic language,¹⁹ to observe what occurs in parallel expressions with the lexeme under consideration. Thus, it will be necessary to consider the contextual sense of a whole range of other

¹⁵ See the summary table in Young, "What is 'Late Biblical Hebrew'?", 258 and the fuller description of methodology in Ian Young, Robert Rezetko, and with the assistance of Martin Ehrensverd, *Linguistic Dating of Biblical Texts, Volume 1: An Introduction to Approaches and Problems*, (London: Equinox Publishing Ltd, 2008), 111-42.

¹⁶ Antoon Schoors, *The Preacher Sought To Find Pleasing Words: A Study of the Language of Qoheleth. Part I: Grammar*, OLA 41 (Leuven: Peeter's Press, 1992), 221.

¹⁷ As Groom highlights in her study, the role of the scholar's intuition in semantic studies is important to know when to limit an investigation (Susan Anne Groom, *Linguistic Analysis of Biblical Hebrew* (Glasgow: Paternoster Press, 2003), 116-30).

¹⁸ References to Mishnaic Hebrew (Sáenz-Badillos = Rabbinic Hebrew) describe the language of Israel following the return of the exiles. Its influence can perhaps be seen in some DSS, and the Bar-Kochba letters, and certainly in later writings of the Pharisees and later Rabbis. See Kutscher, *Hebrew Language*, chapter 6 (115-47) or Sáenz-Badillos, *Hebrew Language*, chapter 6 (161-201).

¹⁹ Certainly some parts are lyrical (e.g., 3:1-8; 12:2-7) and much of the material is proverbial.

terms aside from specifically chosen time-related lexemes. From these comparisons it will be possible to ascertain a contextual usage of the term under consideration.

Expressing Time: An Investigation of עת

Two choices are afforded the investigator when it comes to investigating the sense of words. First, one can proceed through the material under investigation observing the use of particular lexemes in the order in which these are presented to the reader. There is wisdom in this approach for it takes seriously the role of the reader and how language is encountered. On the other hand, if the purpose of the investigation is to determine how the narrator or characters in the literature use the language, it can perhaps be assumed those characters will use the language within a range of consistency thereby making it possible to begin an investigation of word usage with what, in the opinion of a reader familiar with all of Ecclesiastes, is the most revealing. While, at times, this distinction will need to be made, the investigation of עת in Ecclesiastes has the benefit of both approaches as the first occurrence is in 3:1, which is part of arguably the most significant cluster of uses.²⁰ Following a look at the uses in Eccl 3, we will proceed to look at further uses according to the clarity these provide to the investigation.

Eccl 3:1-22

The beginning of the book of Ecclesiastes is taken up with the narrator's introduction (1:1-11), and a larger autobiographical section recalling some of the life undertakings and initial observations of king Qoheleth. Having used some of his personal categories to explore life "under the sun," Qoheleth embarks in chapters three and following to utilize his observations as starting points for a wider-reaching existential examination. This is not to suggest that chapter three is somehow disconnected from Qoheleth's own purported experience. As Krüger suggests, this chapter continues to be the musings of the so-called king Qoheleth about the time-boundedness of all his undertakings that "limits his power of disposition over his own life."²¹ Chapter three carefully considers how time affects life under the sun.

²⁰ Schoors, *Preacher, Part II* in his study of the vocabulary of Ecclesiastes begins with the most salient or demonstrative examples of usage rather than as they are presented narratively.

²¹ Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 75.

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From an exegetical standpoint, it is not improper to consider all of chapter three together,²² though it is convenient to consider the chapter in smaller sections. Thus, we will deal with v. 1 separately from vv. 2-8 before moving onto its use in v. 11 (within 3:9-15) and v. 17 (within vv. 16-21).²³

Ecc1 3:1

The lexeme עת occurs in 3:1 as an introduction to the time poem of vv. 2-8. Here עת occurs in a nominal clause—ועת לכל־חפץ—in a chiasmic arrangement with the preceding clause לכל זמן. The lexeme זמן is infrequent, occurring only four times in the Hebrew Bible and only in texts considered late.²⁴ It is nearly impossible to posit the distinction between עת and זמן based on the number of available uses, though Longman suggests that עת reflects specific points in time rather than something that is continuous.²⁵

Qoheleth employs עת as a temporal descriptor of לכל־חפץ. We find two other locations where חפץ occurs jointly with עת among its seven total uses:²⁶

²² As does Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 46.

²³ This follows a similar breakdown from Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 84 with the exception that he places v. 9 with the 3:1-8 rather than with vv. 10ff.

²⁴ Ecc1 3:1; Esth 9:27,31; Neh 2:6. The Qumran documents available show the same favouritism toward עת over זמן, though in the Mishnah it appears that the latter is the preferred expression for time.

²⁵ Longman III, *Ecclesiastes*, 114 following Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 92. There are some older works, such as Abraham ibn Ezra that do posit a significant difference between the two. See Josefina Rodríguez Arribas, “Les significations de עת et de זמן dans le commentaire de Qohélet d’Abraham ibn Ezra,” *Revue des Études juives* 165 (2006): 435-44.

²⁶ Ecc1 3:1,17; 5:3,7; 8:6; 12:1,10. The use of חפץ in 5:3, 12:1 and 10, where the term deals with what is pleasurable, is different than the use elsewhere. Longman III, *Ecclesiastes*, 113 indicates that חפץ is an interesting term with its dual nuances of pleasure and activity. He writes, “We know little about the exact relationship between the two meanings of the same root. There may be a semantic development from one meaning to the next, or perhaps they are homonyms.” For a discussion of polysemy and homonymy see Johannes Hendrik Hospers, “Polysemy and Homonymy,” *ZAH* 6 (1993): 114-23. Both BDB and HALOT suggest polysemy as both nuances are carried under the same entry. The two nuances found in Ecclesiastes are evident in the wider body of material in the Hebrew Bible. Among the four instances of חפץ in 1 Kings, referring to the wood supplied by Hiram to Solomon, the object of the trade agreement does not so much satisfy Solomon’s desires, but rather his needs, though DeVries, *1 Kings*, WBC (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2003) uses the gloss “desire” in 5:22, 23, and 24 and “wished” in 9:11. In Jer 22:28, 48:38 and Hos 8:8, a broken vessel (כלי) lacks חפץ in Jer 22:28, 48:38 and Hos 8:8 has anything to do with extreme disappointment that the vessel cannot contain liquid. This is the position of McKane with reference to 48:38 as he writes that Yahweh’s will is to treat “Moab as one might shatter a piece of pottery and render it useless” (William McKane, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah*, 2d. ed. ICC (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1986), 1191). Holladay, however, maintains the nuance of “desire” in 48:38 by translating בו חפץ אין ככלי as “a vessel no one cares for” (William L. Holladay, *Jeremiah* 2, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1989), 610). Holladay refers back to his

כי לכל-חפץ יש עת (8:6), and כי עת לכל-חפץ (3:17). In 3:17, Qoheleth remarks that there is an עת for every חפץ, and parallels this with the idea that there is also an עת for each מעשה. All of this is in the context of God's impending judgement on the righteous and the wicked. The parallel between חפץ and מעשה suggests that חפץ refers to a discrete action or concrete situation, and the use of עת to describe that חפץ pinpoints the discrete temporal moment of that action.²⁷

The occurrence of עת and חפץ together in 8:6 is similarly enlightening as חפץ is constrained by עת and משפט.²⁸ The expression עת ומשפט occurs in the previous verse as the object of what the wise heart knows in light of keeping the commandment of the king that is at odds with the wise man's own inclination. The implication is that the command of the king, however unpleasant, is subject to judgement, in the sense that it is subject to the limitation of the divine actor.²⁹ The limitation of the king's command provides the wise man a way to proceed knowing that the long-term consequences of the command are unforeseeable. Here משפט represents some unknown but discrete action on the power of the king. The use of עת ומשפט with respect to all חפץ in 8:6 confirms that חפץ refers to a concrete and identifiable action or situation. Indeed, it is common for commentators to render חפץ in these occasions as "matter",³⁰ activity,³¹ or "everything" if translated in conjunction with כל.³²

comments on 22:28 where he remarks that חפץ refers to "pleasure" and "desire." He fails to mention the other nuance of "useful." See William L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1986), 610. In these instances, the emotionally neutral notion of "interest" or "usefulness" is appropriate. On the other hand, when the term occurs in construct with another noun, it is difficult to maintain this neutral position. For example, the term חפץ אבני in 58:3 must mean something like "precious stones," (Goldingay and Payne note, however, that the costliness of the stone is not so much in view as its ability to attract attention and catch the eye. Thus, they make use of "delightful" as a gloss for חפץ. See John Goldingay and David Payne, *Isaiah 40-55*, 2d. ed. ICC (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2006), II-355) especially when used in parallel with אבני אקדה ("a precious stone, beryl" HALOT, s.v. אֶקְדָּה). Similarly, the comparison in Prov 3:15 and 8:11 between חפץ and פניני ("pearls of coral" HALOT, s.v. פְּנִינִים) almost certainly highlights the "precious" nuance of חפץ.

²⁷ In the other biblical materials, it is not infrequent for חפץ to be controlled by the verb עשה. See 1 Kgs 5:22, 23; Isa 46:10; 48:14; 53:13a.

²⁸ The LXX does not have the conjunction and has a genitive relationship between the two terms: κρίσεως γινώσκει. The MT finds support in the Vulgate, Syriac, and Targum, however, and is the superior reading.

²⁹ See the further discussion of these verses below on p. 38.

³⁰ Craig G. Bartholomew, *Ecclesiastes*, ed. Tremper Longman III, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament: Wisdom and Psalms (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 158; Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 91; Fox, *Time to Tear Down*, 191, 214, 273; Longman, *Ecclesiastes*, 210; Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 158-59, 276.

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This use of **זמן** to refer to a definable situation is also present in 5:7. There the oppression of the poor is at issue and Qoheleth's advice is "do not be amazed about" (**אַל־תִּתְמָה עַל**) referencing **זמן**. Certainly the reference here cannot be to something that brings "delight," since the circumstances involve oppression and injustice. Qoheleth may accept these as part of life, but at no time gives his approval. It is a particular set of circumstances ("matter", "situation") that are clearly identifiable.

Returning to 3:1, as **זמן** suggests a particular action or matter, **עַתָּה** is either the time or the timing of that particular matter. As **זמן** refers to identifiable actions or events, one can then think of **עַתָּה** as referring to a defined period of time in which this definable action occurs.

Ecc1 3:2-8

The concentration of **עַתָּה** in 3:2-8 makes it more difficult, perhaps contrary to appearance, to get the sense of the term. It severely limits the opportunity to compare lexemes used in parallel given that **עַתָּה** is the one dominant term in the whole of the passage. Nevertheless, it may be possible to ascertain some characteristics of its sense by considering the nature of the actions described as having an **עַתָּה**.

The tight construction and frequent repetition in vv. 2-8 places it in the realm of poetry.³³ Fourteen pairs of words/expressions are themselves paired with **עַתָּה**. Twelve of these pairs contain **עַתָּה** followed by an infinitive construct initiated with the preposition **לְ**. The two exceptions to this pattern are vv. 4b and 5a, which utilise infinitive constructs lacking the preposition,³⁴ and v. 8b, which uses two nouns

³¹ Bartholomew, *Ecclesiastes*, 175; Longman, *Ecclesiastes*, 111, 125.

³² Bartholomew, *Ecclesiastes*, 279; Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 101, 148.

³³ While what constitutes "poetry" is notoriously difficult to define, a simple conceptual definition will suffice. "Poetic expression constitutes a subtle interplay of the rhythmic expression of carefully crafted human speech wrought with special attention to artistic effect. Hebrew poetry constitutes these features along with a perceptible, elastic parallelism" (David L. Petersen and Kent Harold Richards, *Interpreting Hebrew Poetry*, ed. Gene M. Tucker, Guides to Biblical Scholarship. Old Testament Guides (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 14). This definition certainly fits what we find in 3:1-8, and the majority of commentators accept this section as poetry, including Linafelt and Dobbs-Allsopp, "Poetic Line Structure in Qoheleth 3:1," *VT* 60 (2010), 249; Loader, "Qohelet 3:2-8—A "Sonnet" in the Old Testament," *ZAW* 81, no. 2 (1969), 240-42; Brisson, "Ecclesiastes 3,1-8," *Int* 55 (2001), 293; Kamano, *Cosmology*, 84; Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 169.

³⁴ The meaning does not substantially change for those including the preposition and those without a genitive ("a time of/for"). See GKC§114b. W-O§36.2.3e refers to this type of infinitive construct plus **לְ** as "gerundive, explanatory or epexegetical."

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without a governing preposition. The later case is noteworthy, and we will address this inconsistency momentarily. The other difference that crops up in vv. 2b, 5a, and 5b is the presence of addition lexemes clarifying the sense of verbs that would be unclear without them.³⁵ The consistency of the pattern and the terseness of language makes vv. 2-8 some of the most recognizable in all of Ecclesiastes.

The “popular” interpretation of this passage, notes Seow,³⁶ is that the poem describes the appropriate and proper time for people to engage in the actions described therein. The actions described, however, are not a list of exclusive activities, but appear to be more representative of all the activities that are part of the human experience.³⁷ The popular interpretation draws some warrant from the frequent emphasis in other wisdom texts on there being “appropriate times” for activities, such as speech.³⁸

The notion of “proper time” may take two different tracks. On the one hand, one could take the position, based on a very deterministic reading of Ecclesiastes, that the “proper time” represents a predetermined moment when something should take place. Fox admits that this was his earlier position, though he takes a different approach in later works,³⁹ and it is still seen in the approach of Huwiler.⁴⁰ The argument against this position is the emphasis throughout the passage on human activity and humans, with the exception of giving birth and dying, seem to be able to choose the times for these activities.⁴¹ Even Qoheleth suggests in 7:17 that an

³⁵ For example, the verb עקר is used elsewhere in the sense of “to become uprooted” (*niphal* Zeph 2:4), or “to hamstring” (*piel* Gen 49:6). In all other uses the object is required, and thus while a verb such as בנה can be used with the object understood (e.g., “something”), this is not the case with עקר. Similarly, the verb שלח needs further clarification since a more general object (e.g., anything) will not suffice. Galling, “Das Rätsel der Zeit im Urteil Kohelets (Koh. 3,1-15),” *ZTK* 58 (1961), 11 proposes that the phrase is more technical referring to make-shift calculators.

³⁶ Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 169.

³⁷ The events are clearly reflective of human activity rather than, for example, natural phenomena or those of animals.

³⁸ Von Rad mentions Prov 15:23, 25:11; Sir 22:6 and 4:23 in *Wisdom in Israel*, trans. James D. Martin (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1972), 140.

³⁹ Fox, *Time to Tear Down*, 197.

⁴⁰ Murphy and Huwiler, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, 188 as demonstrated in the statement, “God is not mentioned in this section, but is implicit as the One who appoints the proper times.” So too George A. Barton, “The Text and Interpretation of Ecclesiastes 5:19,” *JBL* 27 (1908): 98: “His point is that there is a proper or divinely ordered time for all human activities, and that these go on over and over again.”

⁴¹ Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 170 would disagree suggesting that the activities in 3:2-8 are really not under human control. While this could be said of “birthing” and “dying”, Seow must contend that

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individual can “die before one’s time.” Qoheleth’s own self-introduction in chapters 1 and 2 is filled with descriptions of his own choices. It does not seem to be the ability to choose an individual action that frustrates Qoheleth, but something larger and more sinister in the overall state of human affairs.

Commentators who do not embrace “proper times” as divinely determined suggest that “proper time” is more in the realm of the “right time.” For example, Fox’s later position suggests that this catalogue of times refers to the “right time” defined as “the circumstances when, in the proper course of events, something should happen or be done.”⁴² Fox’s prime example is that there being a “time for war” does not mean that God predetermines nations to declare war on specific dates. Rather, “there are conditions right for war, situations when war is called for and can be effectively prosecuted.”⁴³

Bartholomew links this passage to the consideration in Proverbs of the “propitious time that corresponds with how God has made the world.”⁴⁴ While this lofty notion of connecting with God’s created order may work well for giving birth, death, planting, war, or peace, more mundane matters such as sewing garments or throwing stones along with personal matters such as weeping or embracing seem less likely linked to some “right time” that corresponds to the created order.

It is clear that the attempts by commentators to observe a single pattern that provides an unified interpretation of the list in 3:2-8 has not met with much success. Perhaps Whybray is correct that there is not a single thematic pattern either in the structuring of the word pairs themselves or in the connotation of what constitutes **תע**.⁴⁵ This may be due, as Whybray suggests, to the growth of the passage itself being originally an independent poem that has undergone editing over the passage of

“planting” is somehow a “metaphor for coming to life” and “uprooting” a symbol of death (160). This is another example in the interpretation of Ecclesiastes whereby one item is taken as the “key” in the explanation of other items that on face value do not seem to move in the same direction.

⁴² Fox, *Time to Tear Down*, 197.

⁴³ Fox, *Time to Tear Down*, 198.

⁴⁴ Bartholomew, *Ecclesiastes*, 163.

⁴⁵ Roger Norman Whybray, “‘A Time to Be Born and a Time to Die’: Some Observations on Ecclesiastes 3:2-8,” in *Near Eastern Studies: Dedicated to H.I.H. Prince Takahito Mikasa*, ed. Masai Mori, Hideo Ogawa, and Mamoru Yoshikawa (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1991), 476.

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time.⁴⁶ Inevitably a choice must be made, in the face of competing schemas, as to which schema provides the overriding consideration in whose light the other items in 3:2-8(15), and Ecclesiastes more generally, must be interpreted.

It is frequently mentioned that the temporal lexemes עת and זמן do not refer to duration but rather to a quality of time.⁴⁷ While this is central to the lexemes more generally, it is noteworthy that the situations Qoheleth lists in 3:2-7 are all temporally limited situations or events that are tied to episodes within the life of an individual. Giving birth and death (v. 2a) are events just as planting and uprooting (v. 2b), or killing and healing (v. 3a). While a construction project may take a considerable amount of time, an individual is only involved in the act of building for a finite period. Weeping, laughing (v. 4a), mourning, dancing (v. 4b), moving stones (v. 5a), embracing or embrace avoidance (v. 5b), seeking, and discarding (v. 6a) are similarly temporally limited events. The “time to keep” in parallel with a “time to throw out” suggests it is the event of decision-making that is in view rather than keeping an item in storage. Similarly, tearing and mending (v. 7a), silence and speaking (v. 7b) are discreet actions that are temporally limited. While all these events are of different durations, every item refers to an event that is tied to a concrete action.

This appears to change in v. 8 as love and hate appear to refer to personal emotions.⁴⁸ Similarly, war and peace are not often thought of as discreet actions. Here, however, we may invoke the interpretive strategy of understanding these last four items in light of the previous list. If the previous items refer to events, then these last four items may also refer to concrete actions or events.⁴⁹ There is a time for a loving act, a hateful act, a battle, and to refrain from battle (peace).⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Whybray, “A Time to Be Born,” 480. Whybray uses the absence of the preposition ל before the infinitives of v. 4b as an example of the inconsistencies that may be evidence of growth. Wright’s article “‘For Everything There Is a Season’: The Structure and Meaning of the Forteen Opposites (Ecclesiastes 3:2-8),” in *De la Tôra au Messie: Mélanges Henri Cazelles*, ed. Maurice Carrez, Joseph Doré, and Pierre Grelot (Paris: Desclée, 1981) also suggests that the poem was originally a separate composition.

⁴⁷ Wilch, *Time and Event*, 122 is often cited in this regard as he argues that “Qoheleth does not have moments of time in mind, but rather *occasions* or *situations*.” This is in response to critics who argue that the list of 3:2-8 refers to decisive moments. Bartholomew, *Ecclesiastes*, 163 cites Wilch as one source when he makes the claim that both עת and זמן refer to “specific times rather than to duration.”

⁴⁸ So Bartholomew, *Ecclesiastes*, 165.

⁴⁹ For example, in Deuteronomy “to love” God frequently stands in parallel with “to keep” commandments, or “to walk” in his ways (e.g., Deut 10:12; 11:13, 22; 19:9; 30:16, 22). In the

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Most commentators focus on עת as a reference to the timing of a given action, and we must readily admit that timing in wisdom literature occupies an important place. At the same time, we must admit that understanding all the items in the list as solely related to a divinely appointed “proper time” or even to the “right time” more generally requires the interpreter to consider items that are less likely to have that sense in light of those that are more clearly defensible. Here we propose that given that the nature of the first 24 items is in the realm of “events” of a distinctly limited, though unequal, duration, it is possible that the idea of limited duration should also be carried over into the last four items.

We would argue that, contextually, placing the emphasis on the limited nature of the twenty-eight items rather than the timing makes better sense of the connection with 3:9, “What is the advantage of the doer⁵¹ in that which he toils?” This central question, having been similarly posed in the frame narration at 1:3, resurfaces. If the emphasis of 3:2-8 is on proper timing, then the question of 3:9 is simply the profit of all of people’s work in a world that has a timing of its (his/God’s) own.⁵² We suggest, however, that emphasis may be less on timing than on busy-ness. The list of 3:2-8 is a collection of busy items that almost all people of mature age must deal with regularly and oftentimes over and over.⁵³ The question of v. 9, then, is that in light of all the busy-ness of human beings, what is the profit?⁵⁴

The connection of 3:2-8 and 3:9 with the use of עת in 3:11 also points us toward approaching עת first as a lexeme of limitation rather than first and foremost as one of timing.

account of David and Absalom, Joab accuses David of לשנא את־אחיהּ and לשנא את־אחיהּ as demonstrated by David’s act of weeping over the death of his son Absalom. The two other uses of מלחמה in Ecclesiastes (8:8; 9:11) do not refer to “war time” but to a specific battle.

⁵⁰ As Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 198n. 13 mentions, Qoheleth is referring to “situations for decision.”

⁵¹ A similar expression is in 1:3 מה־יתרון לאדם בכל־עמלו. In fact, the Vulgate uses the same expression in both places (*homo* for העושה in v. 9) though the LXX preserves the participle (τοῦ ποιοῦντος). Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 162 reasons that the expressions are equal.

⁵² So Bartholomew, *Ecclesiastes*, 165 as he sees the question, “asked in relation to time and discerning what is fitting or appropriate in a particular situation.”

⁵³ It seems strange that “war/battle” and “peace” should alone be in the realm of rulers/officials while all the other items are common to the wider experience of humans more generally. It is altogether possible that individual strife could also be in view as in Ps 120:7 or 140:2.

⁵⁴ This would fit well with this programmatic question of 2:22, which is not about timing but busy-ness.

Ecc1 3:10-15

The limitation versus timing question is relevant to the occurrence of our lexeme in the expression **אֶת־הַכֹּל עָשָׂה יָפֶה בְּעֵתוֹ** (v. 11). Here one enters into Qoheleth's thoughts on tasks and time as a follow-up to 3:2-8. As a transition, Qoheleth returns to a familiar question about the **יָתְרוֹן** that comes from one's toil (v. 9), and makes the revelation that he has seen the business (**עֲנִיָּן**) that God has given to human beings, though he never explicitly reveals of what this business may consist.⁵⁵ But within this overarching structure of the business of human beings, God works in order to make everything appropriate (**יָפֶה**) in *its* **עֵת**.⁵⁶ The lexeme **עֵת** stands in conjunction with **הַכֹּל** and **יָפֶה** but also stands in opposition to the next phrase containing **עוֹלָם**.

God frustrates, whether purposefully or accidentally, humans by confronting them with their own finiteness in the span of **עוֹלָם**. While we have yet to explore **עוֹלָם**, the basic gloss of “eternity” is enough to suggest that the contrast between **עֵת** and **עוֹלָם** is in length rather than appropriateness. This dichotomy of time has been noticed by Seow who suggests “Humanity knows of eternity, but can only cope with activities in their time.”⁵⁷ Limited duration and effectiveness is the key feature of the use of **עֵת** here rather than the timing of the event either as something “appointed” or properly timed.

Ecc1 3:16-22

We may next consider the occurrence of **עֵת** in v. 17 by virtue of the lexical and conceptual links between 3:10-15 and 3:16-21. The transition is marked by **וְעוֹד רֵאִיתִי**, which indicates a change in focus, but one that links it with what has just been discussed.⁵⁸ From the wonder of humankind's limitation, Qoheleth turns in 3:16-22 to marvel at humanity's inability to achieve justice. Righteousness and wickedness appear inseparable (v. 16), and thus God judges (**שֹׁפֵט**) them both.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Longman III, *Ecclesiastes*, 118 suggests **עֲנִיָּן** is a negative occupation.

⁵⁶ Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 85n. 5 notes that it is possible to understand the 3ms suffix as referring back to God as the subject of **עָשָׂה** though he himself takes it as reflexive, “its own time.”

⁵⁷ Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 173.

⁵⁸ Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 169.

⁵⁹ Longman III, *Ecclesiastes*, 126 indicates that the “place of judgement” is meant to be a law court. The place of righteousness, taking into account the strict parallelism, is the same place. So rather than, “in the place of (instead of) judgement there is wickedness,” Longman advocates “the place of

While commentators such as Krüger and Longman make a separation between how God's judgement affects the righteous and the wicked (i.e., the righteous are rewarded and the wicked are punished), the text does not make this distinction.⁶⁰ More reasonable is Seow's suggestion that שפּט "does not need to suggest future judgement or a 'day of judgement' but is simply the belief in God's sovereignty, though it would probably be safe to assume that Qoheleth understands God's sovereignty to extend into the future."⁶¹

The main focus comes in the second half of v. 17. Here one finds a parallel statement to 3:1—לְכָל־חַפֵּץ עַתָּה—in which עַתָּה stands in a nominal phrase. Here it is expanded with the addition of בְּלִי־הַמַּעֲשֶׂה placed as the explanation of God's judgement as indicated by כִּי. God judges the righteous and the wicked for there is an עַתָּה for every חַפֵּץ and on account of every מַעֲשֶׂה. The difficulty of the verse is compounded by the final word, שֵׁן. Longman treats the שֵׁן as an asseverative, and translates as "too."⁶² Others suggest emending the word entirely to שֵׁן ("he

judgement (the court)—injustice was there." While it is true that מִקוֹם often designates a specific physical location, this is not always the case. In Ecclesiastes, we have examples where מִקוֹם designates a physical location (e.g., 1:5, 7; 8:10; 10:4; 11:3), but in other cases the use is more general. Thus, in 3:20 הַכֹּל אֶל־מִקוֹם אֶחָד and 6:6 הֲלֹא אֶל־מִקוֹם אֶחָד, the "one place" is not one physical location but one "state"; that is, death. In an analogous way, while it may be possible that מִקוֹם הַמִּשְׁפָּט and מִקוֹם הַצֶּדֶק have legal status as "courts," it is just as likely, given the lack of parallels for either of these two expressions elsewhere and the use of parallelism that equates the two expressions, that these refer not to courts but simply to the "spheres of influence" or "regions" (HALOT, s.v. מִקוֹם, 4). Longman's assurance that "*The place of judgment* is certainly a reference to a place where law was to be adjudicated, the law court," is far from certain.

⁶⁰ Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 91. For Krüger, v. 17 is orthodox meaning that on the one hand God judges and rewards the righteous while on the other hand God judges and punishes the wicked. This is the reason why some suggest it is a secondary gloss. But Krüger suggests that the orthodoxy is mediated in the second half of the verse where two non-mutually exclusive options exist for interpretation. First, God brings about his justice at a certain time, implying that for at least some time he tolerates injustice. Second, one could understand v. 17 as indicating "the changing of the times (cf. 3:1-8) not only allows wickedness but also limits its duration." While we agree that the passage is suggestive of the limited duration of events and activities, we fail to see the distinction between how God treats the righteous and the wicked. For Longman III, *Ecclesiastes*, 127, v. 17 is a case of "fair judgement and proper retribution" at some future event, even though he recognizes that in the following verses Qoheleth does not go on to express any kind of hope in a future judgement. Longman suggests that what we have is a "tension, if not a simple contradiction, in Qoheleth's thinking."

⁶¹ Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 175. The verb שפּט occurs only here in Ecclesiastes. The NJPSV adds another dimension to the debate by considering both the righteous and the wicked together, but translates as "God will doom both righteous and wicked."

⁶² Longman III, *Ecclesiastes*, 125 esp. n. 66. In this Longman follows Charles Francis Whitley, *Koheleth : his language and thought*, BZAW 148 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1979), 34-36 and Bo Isaksson, *Studies in the Language of Qoheleth with Special Emphasis on the Verbal System*, AUU, SUU 10 (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1987), 176.

placed”).⁶³ Seow admits that he is unclear as to what $\square\psi$ could refer, though he is clear he wants to avoid $\square\psi$ as a reference to the future (“there”) as most commentators and the Targum assume, since for him “Qohelet repeatedly insists that people cannot know what will happen in the future.”⁶⁴ While it is indeed true that Qoheleth doubts humanity’s control and knowledge over the future, stating that there is a time for every matter and over every work “there” is hardly a firm and unambiguous statement. In fact, it is not much of an expansion over 3:1, so Seow’s outright dismissal is not necessary by the general thought presented in Ecclesiastes.

The sense of “appointed time” would be appropriate here if judgement was in view; that is, an appointed/appropriate time for judgement. But Qoheleth’s claim is that God’s judgement comes because there is a time for every פִּי and for every work. The עַתָּה is a characteristic of פִּי and מַעֲשֵׂה rather than of judgement, and herein lies the difficulty of Fox’s position that עַתָּה here refers to the proper time of God’s judgement.⁶⁵ Krüger suggests that there is another option here besides “appointed time” and that is the sense of limited time. In v. 17, the changing times give injustice its place and its limit.⁶⁶ All actions and works are limited thereby demonstrating their susceptibility to God’s judgment. The sense of “appointed time” for עַתָּה , especially if this time was appointed by God, would hardly provide justification (כִּי) for the judgment of the righteous and the wicked. Thus, it seems that עַתָּה highlights the limitation of פִּי rather than the appropriateness of an event.

⁶³ Schoors, *Preacher, Part I*, 101 admits that the use of $\square\psi$ here is uncertain. He emends the text to $\square\psi$. In II, 235 he translates as “indeed, a time for every matter and for every work he has appointed.” This emendation greatly influences our understanding of עַתָּה moving it closer to the sense of “appointed time.” So also NRSV.

⁶⁴ Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 166. He translates v. 17 as “I said in my heart, ‘God will judge the righteous and the wicked, for there is a time for every matter, and over every activity there is a destiny’” (159). Seow disagrees with Dahood’s proposal that it means “place” since it never has this meaning elsewhere. He indicates that Whitley’s suggestion of “too, also” is probably not correct, and if it was, it would not come at the end of the sentence. For those that want to emend it to $\square\psi$ (“he appointed”) Seow wonders both why the finite verb would come at the end of the sentence, and how $\square\psi$ uses the preposition עַל . He then states that the ancient versions (LXX, Vulg, and Syr) all indicate that the MT has the correct consonants. Seow would prefer to repoint either as a noun or gerund from $\text{שׁוּם}/\text{שׁוּם}$, and then suggests that the Hebrew $\text{שׁוּם}/\text{שׁוּם}$ “could refer to the determination of events (2 Sam 13:32), or the setting of a date (Exod 9:5; Job 34:23....” Goldman (BHQ, 76*) suggest that from a text critical point of view, MT must stand as is given the lack of alternatives in the versions.

⁶⁵ Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 215. Fox writes that “Inasmuch as everything has a right time...divine judgement too must have a time, and in it God will execute judgement.”

⁶⁶ Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 84. But see especially 91n.37 “contingent changing of the “times” is God’s judgement.”

Chapter Two: Most Frequent Words for Time

We have demonstrated that in chapter 3, where עת is first introduced into the thought of Ecclesiastes, the emphasis is more on the limited duration of events rather than the appropriate timing of these events. As we move out of Eccl 3, we may consider whether this emphasis holds.

Eccl 8:5 and 6

Eccl 8 does provide further evidence that עת occurs in connection with items of limited duration. The royal theme of 8:2-7 focuses upon the proper actions of those who inhabit the royal court. The image of the wise man in a royal court is a common theme in ancient Israelite literature. The storyline runs through the Joseph narrative, Daniel, Aramaic Ahiqar story, and also Ezra 7, Neh 2, Esther, the prayer of Nabonidus, and Tobit. These stories also show some of the challenges facing the royal servant in the court of a foreign power, especially where loyalties are conflicted.⁶⁷

Broadly speaking, the literature suggests two approaches to 8:2-7 divided over to whom the דבר רע belongs. Longman, for example, understands the דבר רע to belong to the courtier. Beginning by reading against the MT in v. 3, Longman argues that אל־תבהל מפניו of v. 3 goes with v. 2: “I say: Observe the king’s command, and do not rush into a vow to God.”⁶⁸ Next, Longman suggests that v. 3 read “You should leave his presence and not persist in an evil matter” meaning that a courtier who has given advice that makes the king angry should not persist in defending his idea, but should withdraw.⁶⁹ Likewise, Waldman in his article suggests that the expression דבר רע is an expression of rebellion against the king. In support, he cites a number of Akkadian parallels where this expression appears to have this connotation. The weaknesses of such a comparison, however, are manifold and does not warrant his conclusion that “our verse clearly has the

⁶⁷ Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 155. See also von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 15-23.

⁶⁸ Longman’s division is supported by LXX and versions. Goldman (BHQ, 99*) suggest that LXX translators may have misunderstood the rare construction אל־תבהל מפניו תלך. Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 280, however, notes that the נבהל מפניו in Gen 45:3 and Job 23:15 has the sense of “be stupefied at his presence...precisely in regard to crippling stupor before someone who is powerful.” If it has this sense, rather than, “do not delay” then moving it to the end of v. 2 serves little purpose.

⁶⁹ Longman III, *Ecclesiastes*, 212.

contextual background of plotting against the king and rebelling against him.”⁷⁰ First, Waldman does not show that this phrase always has this usage in Akkadian, only that it may. Second, the contexts are quite different, since the examples he cites from the Akkadian literature include treaties or letters directly from one king to a vassal. Third, he fails to take into account the identical term in 8:5 (שׁוֹמֵר מִצְוָה) (לֹא יִדַּע דְּבַר רֵעַ). If one retains דְּבַר רֵעַ in the sense of rebellion, the statement becomes redundant since one keeping the command of the king will obviously not be committing rebellion.

Like Longman, we prefer a more general usage of the term referring to an “evil matter.”⁷¹ Contra Longman, however, the “evil matter” is not the idea of the courtier, but the request of the king whose will the wise person must carry out. It is unlikely that the expression has the sense of the NRSV “do not delay when the matter is unpleasant” since the expression עָמַד + בּ always refers in LBH to standing in something or someplace, and the בּ never indicates a time reference in these circumstances.⁷² The phrase “do not remain/stand in an evil matter” could indicate that the “evil matter” is the result of something the wise person has done, said or thought. But, if this is the case, why is the emphasis in the surrounding verses (vv. 2 and 4) on the importance of obedience? If the evil matter is a spoken word the emphasis should be rightly to watch one’s tongue (cf. 5:2; 10:20). But the double emphasis is on keeping the command of the king. The context drives us to see דְּבַר רֵעַ as the decision of the king, which the wise must, though distasteful, carry out and not simply to “remain” (עָמַד) in it without carrying it out.⁷³

The result of this obedience is an escape from harm (v. 5). Krüger suggests that there are two ways to understand the statement יִדַּע דְּבַר רֵעַ. Either it could mean “to know a bad thing” or “to get to know/experience a bad thing.” It depends on “whether the sentence is aimed at the presuppositions of the recommended

⁷⁰ Nahum M. Waldman, “The *dābār ra’* of Eccl 8:3,” *JBL* 98 (1979): 408. Suggesting, however, a contextual background in the literature of another language and time stresses the meaning of “context” to its outer limits.

⁷¹ Longman III, *Ecclesiastes*, 212.

⁷² Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 280. See Eccl 8:3; Esth 5:1-2; 6:5; 7:9; Dan 1:4; 10:17; 11:16; Ezra 10:13; Neh 6:1; 12:39; 1 Chr 17:14; 20:4; 23:30; 2 Chr 18:34; 19:5; 20:5; 35:5

⁷³ Cf. Gen 18:22 where the men go on (הֵלֵךְ) toward Sodom while Abraham remains standing (עָמַד). Similarly also Exod 14:19; Judg 9:7; 1 Kgs 20:38; 2 Kgs 2:7; Jer 17:19; 51:50.

behaviour or at its consequences.”⁷⁴ We take it as the consequences of the behaviour with the sense of “to know something (to experience).”⁷⁵

The characteristic of the wise that is linked to this expectation that obedience leads to less harm is **וְעַתָּה וּמִשְׁפָּט יָדַע לֵב חָכָם**. But what does the heart know? Does it know the proper time and the proper procedure? Or does it know *there is* a fixed time and destiny, so he can be patient?⁷⁶ While it is difficult to be definitive, there is no reason to discount the sense suggested in the previous uses of **עַתָּה** that it represents a temporally limited space.

This understanding of **עַתָּה** moves us toward the following understanding: the advice to obey the commands of the king includes circumstances where the prospective command is a **דְּבַר רָע** (v. 3), for a king can do whatever he has interest (imperfect of **חָפֵץ**) to do. It is safe, within the context of that king’s rule, to be the one carrying out his desire, even if it is a **דְּבַר רָע**, for that wise man will not meet a **דְּבַר רָע**. This reading, however, creates an internal tension within Ecclesiastes since carrying out an act that is characterized as **רָע** is the prerogative of the fool (4:17) and the result of a lack of swift justice (8:11)? To this seeming discrepancy, 8:5b offers a response—the wise heart comprehends that every action ultimately comes under the judgement (**מִשְׁפָּט**) of God and is limited (**עַתָּה**). This allows even the wise to follow a course of action, under orders of the king, that otherwise would seem to be the providence of fools. In this case, understanding **עַתָּה** as a limitation or “limited time” helps elucidate the meaning of 8:2-5.

Verse 6 goes further with the themes of **מִשְׁפָּט** and **עַתָּה** in the expression: **כִּי לְכָל-חָפֵץ יֵשׁ עַתָּה וּמִשְׁפָּט**. This phrase is the first of four **כִּי**-clauses. The difficulty for exegetes centres on the connection of the four **כִּי**-clauses. The first **כִּי** is generally taken as causal thereby providing an explanation for what is proposed in v. 5.⁷⁷ The second **כִּי** may be taken as concessive (“though”) or adversative.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 154.

⁷⁵ HALOT, s.v. **יָדַע** 5,a.

⁷⁶ Schoors, *Preacher, Part II*, 233-34. In the end, Schoors remains unsure.

⁷⁷ Longman III, *Ecclesiastes*, 213 and Schoors, *Preacher, Part I*, 106.

⁷⁸ So Longman III, *Ecclesiastes*, 213 who understands a contrast between v. 6b and 6a. This highlights the contrast between the appropriate time, on the one hand, and the trouble humans experience, which makes it difficult to contemplate the appropriate time.

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Schoors prefers the rendering of Lohfink who translates the consecutive כִּי's as "surely" (*allerdings*).⁷⁹

It has also been suggested by Delitzsch, however, that the fourfold כִּי of vv. 6-7 are, in fact, four parts of the argument emanating from v. 5.⁸⁰ More recently Seow, after noting the various ways to approach the fourfold כִּי of vv. 6-7, suggests that one can see all four as the objects of יָדַע.⁸¹ The result of such an understanding is an extended lecture on using the limitation of time to one's own advantage.

In verse 6, Qoheleth extrapolates from what the wise heart knows to what can more generally be asserted: it is not only the דְּבַר רַע that has limitation and judgement, but it is everything that attracts human attention (כָּל־חַפֵּץ). Again, the use of כִּי continues the lines of the argument and asserts כִּי־רַע הָאָדָם רַבָּה עָלָיו.⁸² The identity of the 3ms suffix would provide us with vital information for the understanding of this verse, but its identity is vague. Is the suffix referring to הָאָדָם, or could it refer back to the one with the wise heart in v. 5? Though commentators favour הָאָדָם, one cannot discount the other possibility.⁸³ Certainly, הָאָדָם is the nearest singular antecedent, but how does the oppressiveness of wickedness upon all of humanity help Qoheleth with his point that the wise person should obey the commands of the king? Or if this material goes with what follows, how does the oppressive nature of humanity's own wickedness relate to one's helplessness in the face of the turmoil of life? While it is grammatically possible, it does not contribute to its surrounding context.

⁷⁹ Schoors, *Preacher, Part I*, 106. Schoors suggests that the most convincing argument is posed by Lohfink who suggests vv. 6-7 are "quotations of former expositions, with which Qoh rejects the proverb of vs. 5." This is maintained in the translation of Lohfink's commentary into English, though there v. 6 begins with "Nevertheless" and then joins the four כִּי statements with a simple "and" (Lohfink, *Qoheleth*). The difficulty of this view, of course, is maintaining that something has been quoted when there is no textual indication that this is so. See Fox, "Quotations in Biblical Literature."

⁸⁰ Schoors, *Preacher, Part I*, 106 and Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes*, trans. M. G. Easton (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1891), 342.

⁸¹ Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 281.

⁸² Longman III, *Ecclesiastes*, 214 agrees with Roger Norman Whybray, *Ecclesiastes*, NCBC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 132 that רַע here refers not to sin but to the ignorance of humans. He takes the clue for the meaning from v. 7 where ignorance is at issue.

⁸³ Both Bartholomew, *Ecclesiastes*, 279 and Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 276, for example, use "humanity" to translate הָאָדָם and then translate the 3ms suffix as plural ("them") to complete the sequence. Others, such as Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 150 and Fox, *Time to Tear Down*, 273 retain a singular referent for הָאָדָם, and so utilize "him" for the 3ms suffix, but it is clear for Krüger and Fox that the "him" is the man rather than the preceding "heart of the wise."

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On the other hand, if the 3ms suffix harkens back to the לְבַחֲכֶם, then one encounters four concessive examples of what the wise heart knows expanding Qoheleth's thoughts on the wise person.⁸⁴ The wise person knows not only that the hard commands of the king are subject to limitation and judgement, but that all things are so subject because he is acutely aware of the wickedness of humanity (v. 6b). Similarly, the wise one in v. 7 does not know what will be.⁸⁵ The wise person is the subject of a similar statement at the end of the chapter, for in v. 17 Qoheleth sets up a hypothetical: וְגַם אִם־יֹאמַר הַחֲכָם לִדְעַת לֹא יוּכַל לִמְצָא ("even if the wise one says he knows [the works done under the sun], he is not able to discover [them]").⁸⁶ Thus for Qoheleth, the wise person is not likely to make such a wide sweeping claim, but *even if* they did, it would be false. In v. 8, one clearly sees a change of subject—אִין אָדָם. The continuation of לְבַחֲכֶם as the subject of vv. 5b-7 makes good sense of the text as is.

In summary, the wise person is able to bear up under difficult conditions not simply because he/she knows the "proper" time and "proper" method of dealing with royalty. Instead, the wise person understands that kings are part of the divine establishment (v. 3) but that even if the matter should seem foolish related to participation in wicked actions, the wise heart understands that all things, even those matters of the king, are subject to limitation and judgement. This temporal restraint is a practical consideration for all who seek wisdom, and the wise one knows that "this too shall pass."

⁸⁴ For example, in 1:13 the preposition plus 3ms suffix בּוֹ of עֲנִין רַע נָתַן אֱלֹהִים לְבְנֵי הָאָדָם refers all the way back to עֲנִין. Cf. 2:21, 3:10. The Greek translator of Ecclesiastes did not allow for the antecedent of the suffix to be לְבַחֲכֶם. The use of αὐτόν allows for either πράγμα (neuter) or ἄνθρωπος (masculine) to be the referent, but not καρδιά (feminine).

⁸⁵ For Longman III, *Ecclesiastes*, 214, v. 7 is of prime importance to the whole passage. While in v. 6, Qoheleth indicates that there is a proper time for everything, he admits in v. 7 that no one can calculate that proper time. It is interesting that Longman comments concerning v. 7 that the "specific limitation here is the wise person's ignorance concerning the future." Longman's translation in v. 6 has already changed the subject from the wise person to people in general: "people's troubles lie heavily upon them" (210). So why does Longman insist that this is the wise person's ignorance in v. 7?

⁸⁶ The NRSV reads "even though those who are wise claim to know, they cannot find it out." The phrase is much more tentative than the NRSV suggests, and not an indictment against the wise in general, but only those who would say that he/she truly knows what is going on in the world.

Eccl 9:11 and 12

Just as 8:5-6 utilizes עת in conjunction with another term (משפט), so too does 9:11 (פגע). This small section relates עת to the general disorder of the universe. The world Qoheleth inhabits does not always reward those who possess certain talents or abilities. Those who are קל (swift) should stand a good chance in a race, but are not always victorious. Those who are גבור should fare better in battle, but sometimes do not. Qoheleth does not feign to hold the keys to success for it is doubtful that any sort of consistency gains a foothold תחת־השמש; “training and education” are not enough to eliminate time and chance.⁸⁷ It is not that correlation between speed and victory, or riches and understanding, does not exist. If these were the only factors involved a standard equivalent may be possible. Qoheleth’s observation is that other external factors beyond a participant may control what transpires. He refers to these external factors as עת and פגע.⁸⁸

The term פגע occurs infrequently and is seen otherwise only in 1 Kgs 5:18 [Eng 5:4]. There, Solomon, in a letter to King Hiram of Tyre, declares that God had given Solomon rest all around and אין שטין ואין פגע רע. It appears that the phrase refers to two potential sources of difficulty for Solomon, neither of which are currently operational: persons (שטין) presumably trouble-makers, and unfortunate or malicious circumstances (פגע רע). The use in Ecclesiastes perhaps implies that the פגע is רע, but this designation is not necessary.⁸⁹ “Chance”⁹⁰ prevents the reasonable from occurring: the swift runner twists an ankle, the mighty warrior drops the sword, the wise lose their means by a sudden change in government, the understanding-one suffers a fire and loses his barn. Ill-fortune is not the only factor in view, for Qoheleth mentions עת as a factor. But how does עת stand as a factor that prevents what seems natural or reasonable from occurring? Again, עת as limitation is informative. If given enough time, perhaps a swift runner will win the

⁸⁷ Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 175. On 174, Krüger remarks that v. 11a is not intended to show that the swift never win a race. Its intent is to show that this is far from a certainty

⁸⁸ Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 308 takes עת ופגע as a hendiadys and translates as “a timely incident.” This is possible, but there are other similar expressions (עת ומשפט) in Qoheleth, and what distinguishes when one is an example of hendiadys and not the other? Elsewhere (321) Seow explains עת ופגע as a “accident, perhaps a fatal accident.” The two ideas are linked together so that the unexpected is the reason for the failure of the gifted. Seow suggests “This is precisely why the author urges people to enjoy life at every opportunity (see kol- ‘et, literally, ‘at every time’ in 9:8).”

⁸⁹ Schoors, *Preacher, Part II*, 117.

⁹⁰ HALOT, s.v., פגע.

race, but races are limited and a runner's life is temporally limited. Perhaps over the long run those with understanding will accumulate riches, but every action is bounded by temporal limitations. Business ventures are played out in real time rather than idealized time.

Fox has suggested that the expression **עַתָּה וּפְגַע** is a hendiadys reading as “a time of mishap.”⁹¹ Here the emphasis is put on the moment of transition from what should take place to what can no longer take place. Schoors disagrees with the label of hendiadys for this expression suggests, “time and change are two distinct realities.”⁹² For Schoors, however, **עַתָּה** represents an appointed time that is out of humanity's control. While the idea of uncontrollability certainly fits with the idea, the corresponding belief that the time must be appointed is not in view. How the moment comes about is certainly a legitimate line of inquiry but one that Qoheleth does not take up here. The section is observational rather than speculative: human beings are subject to limitation by time as well as by misfortune. A lack of time to complete a race or a battle means that setbacks (misfortune) play a greater roll than skill or ability.

This unpredictability is the focus of v. 12: **לֹא יֵדַע הָאָדָם אֶת־עָתִידוֹ**. Is it necessary, as Crenshaw suggests, that **עָתִידוֹ** here requires the meaning of “death”?⁹³ More nuanced is Bartholomew's position whereby he remarks that “Qoheleth does not say so, but it is probably not by chance that for both fish and bird this chance experience leads to death.”⁹⁴ Human beings are not able to operate on a schedule that they themselves choose. The key feature of 9:11-12 is unpredictability rather than predeterminism. These moments are neither “appointed times” or “proper/fitting times” but isolated moments of time that limit the human experience.

Human beings do not know their temporal limitations, whether this is the ultimate limit—death—or other limitations that arise. Following the trap metaphor,

⁹¹ Fox, *Time to Tear Down*, 296.

⁹² Schoors, *Preacher*, Part II, 410.

⁹³ Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 165. So too Graham S. Ogden, “Qoheleth IX 1-16,” *VT* 32 (1982): 165. “The “time” is a euphemism for man's fate in death, as is clear from the parallel use in v. 11 of **עַתָּה** and the verb *qrh*, the nominal form of which, *migreh*, is the key feature of vv. 2, 3.” It is not clear that **עַתָּה** in v. 11 must be death, and to suggest that **יָקִרָה** indicates death because it comes from the same root as **מָקָרָה** is flawed.

⁹⁴ Bartholomew, *Ecclesiastes*, 306.

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Qoheleth remarks **וְיִקְשִׁים בְּנֵי הָאָדָם לַעֲתָרָה**. The use of the preposition **ל** in a time expression is more expressive of “concurrence (*at*) rather than duration (*in*).”⁹⁵ Again, **עַתָּה** is often taken as a euphemism for death, though this is not strictly necessary. It represents a moment when human plans come to their limitation.

Our investigation reveals that the use of **עַתָּה** in this passage represents a brief episode of time that places a limitation on all abilities in life-changing events.⁹⁶ The perspective of the passage is “from below” rather than “from above” with no emphasis on the deterministic attribute of time, whether appointed or appropriate, but on the unpredictability of human experience including, but not limited to, the limiting moment of one’s death.

Ecc1 8:9

The use of **עַתָּה** as a marker of limitation rather than appointment is also clear from 8:9, though we must admit that its grammatical usage here is unique in Ecclesiastes. Here it begins a phrase and is followed immediately by the relative pronoun **אֲשֶׁר**. As Krüger notes, there are two possibilities for this construction. Either it is a temporal accusative (“while, when” as NRSV or NJPSV) or it represents a nominal sentence (“There is a time” followed by relative pronoun as KJV and NIV).⁹⁷ This begs the question whether **עַתָּה** as a “limiting” time provides any interpretive value to this small section of 8:9-10.

As Schoors rightly notes, whatever its meaning here, **עַתָּה** “appears not to be the appropriate or appointed time.”⁹⁸ Schoors suggests it functions as an accusative of time, but prefers not to reduce **עַתָּה אֲשֶׁר** to a temporal conjunction. Both Longman and Seow also render it as an accusative of time.⁹⁹ The accusative of time

⁹⁵ BDB, s.v. **ל**, 6a.

⁹⁶ Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 320 places all of 9:11-10:15 under one large unit on the risks of life. The point of 9:11-12 is that the world does not operate under strict guidelines that, by following, one can guarantee success. Qoheleth does not suggest there is no benefit to swiftness or wisdom but only that these do not guarantee success.

⁹⁷ Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 157. The other possibility is to follow LXX (τὰ ὅσα), which presupposes **אֲשֶׁר** rather than **עַתָּה**. MT has the support of other Greek versions, Vulgate, Syriac and Targum. The commentators do not generally follow this alternative.

⁹⁸ Schoors, *Preacher, Part II*, 119.

⁹⁹ Longman III, *Ecclesiastes*, 215 suggests that the **עַתָּה** of 8:9 makes “perfectly good sense” once **עַתָּה** is recognized as an accusative of time. See also Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 284 who suggests “time” here points back to “time” in vv. 5-6.

specifies the time an action takes place or the duration of the action,¹⁰⁰ and answers either the question of “when?” or “how long?”¹⁰¹ Both in sense and construction, rendering עת אשר as an accusative of time makes the best sense of the statement. As such, it suggests that עת refers to a certain time period in the same way as יום, לבקר or לילה, ערב. Thus, it confirms that עת does not always (if ever) have the sense of “appointed time” and also that it may be understood as a duration of time, though this duration need not be anything more than a moment.

Ecc1 7:17

While the previous usages of עת suggest the lexeme is used with reference to duration rather than (proper) timing, there are a number of passages where timing does appear to play a role in the understanding of עת, at least at first glance. We will examine these instances beginning with Ecc1 7:17. This verse occurs in the context of 7:15-17, which looks at the value of wisdom/righteousness and folly/wickedness. The exclamation את־הכל ראיתי בימי הבל־י begins this section. Both Seow and Longman suggest that in light of the two situations to be described את־הכל ראיתי can be translated as “I have seen both.”¹⁰² It seems strange, however, that a reader would be expected to know that such a general word as כל has the sense of “both” before knowing that two situations are in view. Rather, we prefer to render את־הכל ראיתי colloquially as “I have seen it all,” which then goes on to render two rather shocking examples of what Qoheleth means by “seeing it all.”¹⁰³

Qoheleth observes that righteousness does not necessarily produce long life, nor does wickedness necessarily result in premature death. There is no evidence, according to Qoheleth, that the human community is a closed system that brings about swift retribution or reward. Krüger’s view comes close to this, though his

¹⁰⁰ W-O §10.2.2c.

¹⁰¹ GKC §118 i-k.

¹⁰² Longman III, *Ecclesiastes*, 194 and Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 252. Seow suggests that v. 18 and 2:14 make suitable parallels. In v. 18, however, the 3mp suffix suggests the referent (כל־ם) and points the reader to the aforementioned two instances. Thus, “both” makes good sense here. In 2:14, כל also comes after two referents and so context makes “both” a suitable choice. He suggests 3:19-20 as a third example, but in his own translation (159) he uses “all” and “everything” to translate כל־ם.

¹⁰³ So Bartholomew, *Ecclesiastes*, 253 “I have observed everything in my enigmatic life.” A footnote on “everything” suggests the alternative “both.”

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statement betrays a certain bias toward interpreting Qoheleth through the lens of “traditional wisdom.” He states “Righteousness and wisdom may raise a person’s chances of a long and good life, but they cannot guarantee it, as shown by *exceptional cases* [italics mine] one can experience (v. 15).”¹⁰⁴ Why should Qoheleth’s example be described as exceptional? Though perhaps one could interpret the use of the singular in this manner, this is not required by either the syntax or the overall sense. If the case were so exceptional, why would Qoheleth advocate caution with respect to righteousness and wisdom in v. 16? If righteousness and wisdom only failed in exceptional cases, it hardly seems legitimate to caution against this approach.

It is the lack of evidence by experience that leads Qoheleth to suggest that the proper pursuits of human beings do not involve excesses or one-upmanship. In vv. 16-17 one finds parallel expressions that end with the term in question, עַתָּה. The parallels are as follows.

למה תשומם:	ואל־תתחכם יותר	אל־תהי צדיק הרבה
(Why should you be surprised?)	(and do not act wise as an advantage.)	(Do not be too righteous,)
למה תמות בלא עתֶךָ:	ואל־תהי סכל	אל־תרשע הרבה
(Why should you die outside of your time?)	(and do not be a fool.)	(Do not be too wicked,)

Seow suggests that the above arrangement is chiasitic. Thus, צדיק is actually paralleled to סכל and אל־תתחכם is then parallel to אל־תרשע הרבה.¹⁰⁵ This allows Seow to posit that אל־תהי צדיק means the same as אל־תצדיק since surely אל־תהי סכל means the same as אל־תסכל. By extension then, the meaning is “do not show yourself to be righteous” = “do not flaunt your righteousness.” The question is how flaunting one’s righteousness leads to what Seow translates as “lest

¹⁰⁴ Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 139.

¹⁰⁵ Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 253. It is interesting that Seow suggests the parallelism in these verses weakens any claim that moral categories are in view by invoking Loader, *Polar Structures in the Book of Qoheleth*, BZAW 152 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1979), 47-48 for support. Loader’s parallels, however, do not correspond to Seow’s chiasitic arrangement. Loader views the parallels as between חכם/צדיק and סכל/רשע, which show “that they are identical in context and that they do not represent ethical categories.” Each arrives at the same conclusion for different reasons.

you be confounded” or “deeply depressed.”¹⁰⁶ Overall we prefer to keep a straight parallel, notwithstanding the similar looking uses of אֶל־תְּהִי סָכָל and אֶל־תְּהִי צָדִיק.¹⁰⁷

Seow rightly disagrees with Whybray’s conclusion that v. 16 deals with hypocrisy. Seow argues that the Hithpael in classical Hebrew is not an indicator of pretense so “the danger lies in overconfidence, rather than in a lack of sincerity.”¹⁰⁸ Rather than present the reader with two choices in the manner of proverbial wisdom, Qoheleth advocates a blended approach that takes into account the imperfect knowledge humans have about the universe.¹⁰⁹ In Krüger’s estimation, it betrays a “mediocre utilitarian ethic.”¹¹⁰

The final warning of v. 17 indicates that excessive wickedness and any folly may lead one to a premature death.¹¹¹ The idea of dying before one’s time suggests that there is an “appointed time,” a divinely decreed moment, when one should die. This idea of a predetermined moment does seem unlikely here, however. If the moment of one’s death is decreed by God in some fatalistic sense, then how would one die any sooner than one’s appointed time? The implication of the verse, then, is that everyone dies at some moment or another (Fox’s “proper time”), but this moment can be adjusted depending on one’s actions. The use of עַתָּה, then, is the time marker of one’s death.¹¹² That the time of one’s death can be adjusted based on

¹⁰⁶ Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 254. On 267, Seow explains that “confounded” perhaps indicates “a state of emotional or psychological torpidity akin to what is identified today as depression.”

¹⁰⁷ The verb סָכָל does not occur in either Proverbs or the remainder of Ecclesiastes, and the verb צָדִיק occurs only once as a participle (Prov 17:15) in either book. It may simply be that in some circles the verbal idea of “being a fool/righteous” was expressed better as אֶל־תְּהִי סָכָל/צָדִיק plus הִיא rather than as a verbal expression.

¹⁰⁸ Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 266. Longman III, *Ecclesiastes*, 195.

¹⁰⁹ Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 268.

¹¹⁰ Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 140.

¹¹¹ Longman III, *Ecclesiastes*, 196 notes that of the four characteristics in vv. 16-17, only folly is unqualified. For him, this leads to two conclusions. First, Qoheleth suggests that folly cannot be a part of one’s life. Second, since Qoheleth argues against “excessive wickedness” then Qoheleth leaves open the possibility that there is a reasonable amount of wickedness permissible. This is a reasonable assumption, but in light of 8:2-7, Qoheleth may have in mind an involvement in wickedness that is not entirely of one’s own doing. So this is not necessarily at odds with Lev 19:2, as Longman suggests, since the circumstances may require some wickedness, but this is not to be sought (“too wicked”).

¹¹² Just as English speaker’s would comment on one’s *untimely* death, it does not necessarily indicate a strict position whereby one did not die at their *appointed time*, but rather than this death was unexpected, tragic, or unforeseen.

one's behaviour is hardly as surprising a claim to the reader of Ecclesiastes as the revelation that righteousness and wisdom are no guarantee of advantage and success. While "appointed time" has some traction in the understanding of this verse, it is not necessarily so and is more likely to be seen as such when one already has that view of previous occurrences, which we have shown is not necessarily the case.

Eccl 9:8

Another instance of עת resists both the notion of limitation and appointed time. The particular usage of עת in 9:8 is governed by the prepositional phrase בכל. In the other twelve occurrences of בכל in Ecclesiastes,¹¹³ the expression points the reader to the totality of its head noun (e.g., 5:17 "to see goodness in all [the totality of] his toil"). In 9:8, the totality of time is in view so that Qoheleth advises the reader to always be in white garments as an exhortation to experience life's simple pleasures.¹¹⁴ Fresh, clean garments are an indication of a good life.¹¹⁵

Similarly elsewhere, the expression עת בכל frequently signifies "all the time" without referring to the action occurring at every moment.¹¹⁶ For example, Prov 17:17 suggests that a friend loves "all the time" (בכל-עת) pointing to the consistency of the relationship rather than continual loving actions. Similarly in Exod 18:22, appointed judges acts as judges בכל-עת indicating the consistency of the position rather than the acts of judgement.

The usage in Ecclesiastes points neither to עת as "appointed time" nor as a specific episode, but the idiom בכל-עת approaches a more general reference for time.

¹¹³ Occuring with עמל in 1:3; 2:19, 22; 3:13; 5:17, מעשה in 2:11, אל in 7:28 with reference to women, אשר in 9:3 and 6 with reference to what is being done, and a 3mp suffix in 11:8 referring to שני. The usage in 5:8 is difficult with BHQ preferring על-כל against MT but in line with various Greek manuscripts.

¹¹⁴ Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 171 contra Lohfink, *Qoheleth*, 120 who states that "Qoheleth is no believer in the "small joys of everyday," as many moralists would recommend. He envisions great banquets." Perhaps we do fit the category of a moralist for we certainly think Qoheleth has in mind here the "small joys of everyday."

¹¹⁵ Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 301.

¹¹⁶ See Exod 18:22, 26; Lev 16:2; Pss 10:5; 34:2; 62:9; 106:3; 119:20; Job 27:10; Prov 5:19; 6:14; 8:30; 17:17; Eccl 9:8; Esth 5:13.

Eccl 10:17

The last use of עת in Ecclesiastes is the one instance that appears to favor a sense of “right time” or “appointed time” though it is possible that the episodic use of עת may also be in play, as we shall suggest.

Woes and blessings upon leaders form the context for the use of עת in 10:17.¹¹⁷ The comment comes as two parallel statements. The first, the woe (אִי), is pronounced upon a land where the king is but a youth (נער) and the princes (שָׂרִי) feast (אָכַל) in the morning (בֶּקֶר). In Ecclesiastes, אָכַל is a pleasurable activity and is associated with blessing. Qoheleth’s advice often extols eating and drinking as the pinnacle of life תַּחַת-הַשָּׁמַיִם.¹¹⁸ Qoheleth’s only other use of בֶּקֶר is in 11:6. There, Qoheleth advises industrious activity בַּבֶּקֶר as well as in the evening. In an agricultural society, the morning is obviously an important time for work and productivity. This can be seen even in the Exodus accounts where the text describes God’s provision in the wilderness of manna in the mornings, which requires little preparation time, and the provision of quail (שָׁלֵו) in the evening when the main meal could be prepared (Exod 16).

The woe in Eccl 10:17 refers to princes feasting in the morning. Certainly Qoheleth is not averse to feasting since in v. 19 it is depicted as a positive activity. Instead, it must be the timing of the feasting that is of concern. But there are two aspects of timing that may be at issue here. First, if morning is the time when one should work then the issue could be that the princes have replaced working time with feasting time. There is nothing inappropriate about eating in the morning but “These people were ready to indulge themselves even in the morning and were, thus, incapable of doing their duties.”¹¹⁹ Qoheleth is clear in other places that eating and drinking goes hand in hand with enjoyment of one’s toil,¹²⁰ rather than a replacement for it. Perhaps this is at issue. On the other hand, perhaps the issue is not just feasting “in the morning” as opposed to working, but that feasting starts in the

¹¹⁷ Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 187 notes that one finds a similar discussion on the appropriate background for royalty in *Ep. Arist.* 288ff. between a Jewish scribe and the Ptolemaic king.

¹¹⁸ Eccl 2:24; 3:13; 5:18; 8:15; 9:7.

¹¹⁹ Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 329.

¹²⁰ Eccl 2:24; 3:13; 5:18.

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morning and is not confined just to the morning.¹²¹ A feast that starts in the morning would presumably indicate that the whole day is occupied with revelry rather than a fixed time spent in celebration. Fox suggests this understanding when he writes that “in the morning” does “not just mean that they have breakfast, but that they eat and drink *all day*, or in the words of Prov 30:22, ‘are sated with bread.’”¹²² These two possibilities need to be confirmed with the parallel phrase in the second half of the verse.

The woe phrase is paralleled by a “blessed” phrase (אשר יך ארץ) indicating the conditions of blessing. The contrasted element to a king being a נער is that he would be a בן־חוריים (“son of noble ones”). Age is not at issue here so much as inexperience. The second portion of the verse, which is our primary concern, speaks of princes feasting בעת.

The majority of commentators suggest that the issue here is the timing of revelry.¹²³ The contrast to בבקר is “at the right time”, which would presumably not be the morning but after one’s ruling duties have been accomplished. This certainly fits the context of the argument. Implicit in this understanding, however, is that עת represents a limited amount of time, an understanding of עת that we have observed in the other uses of עת. The contrast is between a feast that lasts all day and one that is confined. It is certainly not a divinely appointed time, but rather a time that allows the nobles to keep their responsibility of leading the people.

There is further indication that the verse advocates restraint rather than simply proper timing. Qoheleth suggests that feasting ought to be בגבורה and not

¹²¹ Schoors, *Preacher, Part I*, 194 mentions that for a number of different reasons exegetes have decided that בבקר could mean “from morning on” including Mitchell J. Dahood, “The Phoenician Background of Qoheleth,” *Bib* 47 (1966): 281 who argues that both here and in 11:6 “from morning on” is the preferable translation.

¹²² Fox, *Time to Tear Down*, 309.

¹²³ The notion of proper time is often cited in the literature. Thus Schoors, *Preacher, Part II*, 117 suggests “leaders are entitled to a good meal, provided they have it at the right time (עת). This implicitly supposes that they know the right moment.” It also implicitly suggests that those who are reading know the right moment. Likewise, Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 188 suggests a potential background of Isaiah 5:11, 22: “Ah, you who rise early in the morning in pursuit of strong drink, who linger in the evening to be inflamed by wine” (v. 11); “Ah, you who are heroes in drinking wine and valiant at mixing drink” (v. 22). But the issue in these passages is not the “proper time” for drinking but the fact that it surpasses all limits. Thus, Krüger’s use of these two examples lends strength to the argument that the issue here is reserve and limitation rather than proper timing.

בַּשָּׂתִי. The lack of parallel elsewhere makes exposition more difficult,¹²⁴ but Bartholomew and Longman's "for strength" is not preferred since כֹּחַ would have the sense of "for the purpose of."¹²⁵ The use of כֹּחַ to indicate *means* as opposed to *purpose* is more common.¹²⁶ It is "with strength" (i.e., "heartily") but not "with drunkenness."¹²⁷ Thus, it indicates a degree to which one should feast, but also sets a limit to that degree. The concern throughout vv. 16-17 is the self-discipline of leaders for the good of the land they govern. After all, who in the land would have more likelihood to waste their time idly and in the pursuit of pleasure than those who have the wealth and means to pursue it? Qoheleth's advice is to place a limitation on this pursuit while still ensuring the enjoyment of it, since it can still be undertaken בַּגְּבוּרָה.

Summary: The Sense of עֵת

We have examined the sense of the lexeme עֵת in its 40 occurrences within Ecclesiastes. Through this examination, we have seen that the popular notion of עֵת as "appointed" time does not adequately capture its use within Ecclesiastes nor does it always have the clear sense of "proper" time when events ideally should take place.

We have observed that עֵת cannot have the sense of appointed time at 3:17 since what is at issue is not an appointed time for judgement, but עֵת itself constitutes the judgment. That an event has an עֵת makes it limited and ineffectual. Similarly, the wise are able to operate well in a situation that is unfavourable because of the understanding that everything, including the dictates of a ruler, are limited (8:5-6). Similarly, appointed time does not properly convey the sense of 7:17 since the notion of dying before one's appointed time leaves in serious doubt that there really was an appointed time. In this case, the idea that there is a usual time when

¹²⁴ So Longman III, *Ecclesiastes*, 250. In his solution, בַּגְּבוּרָה has the sense of "to be that they eat to sustain them through the day." But this is somewhat at odds with his construction of v. 16 since he says what is at issue there is the inappropriate time of day (249). If בַּגְּבוּרָה is eating in such a way as to sustain the noble throughout the day, the eating must have taken place in the morning.

¹²⁵ Bartholomew, *Ecclesiastes*, 319 and Longman III, *Ecclesiastes*, 249.

¹²⁶ HALOT, s.v., כֹּחַ, suggesting the basic meaning is local and instrumental.

¹²⁷ Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 330 prefers to use גְּבוּרָה with the sense of manliness, but translates as "with fortitude." For Seow, "In the context of our passage in Ecclesiastes, however, this "manliness" is manifested in self-control, as opposed to drunkenness."

one would, in the normal course of events, die is apparent. There is no need to posit that either 8:9 or 9:8 require the notion of an appointed or proper time, with the first being an accusative of time and the other being a general reference to “all the time” (כל עת).

On the other hand, 3:1, 2-8 and 10:17 could fit the popular usage of עת as “appointed time” or “proper time.” We have shown in this chapter, however, that these usages are not demanded by the lexeme or the context. Instead, in the same way that 1:3-11 expresses disillusionment with the movement of time generation by generation, so chapter 3 expresses disillusionment that individual actions are limited in duration, effect, and sustainability. It is not the timing that is central but the lack of effect. Similarly, the focus of 10:16-17 could be taken as (self-) limitation by leadership as a blessing to the land they are entrusted to serve.

It is difficult to posit a singular definition for עת, and while there are places where “appointed time” or “proper time” may fit the usage, this sense cannot be applied equally to all usages of עת. What is consistent among the uses of עת, however, is its connection to actions or situations that are temporally limited, and while there is no consistent duration applied to עת it generally is associated with events that are of short duration, perhaps measured in minutes rather than days or weeks. The association with limited duration and limiting events will be kept in mind as we examine further temporal lexemes in Ecclesiastes.

Expressing Time: An Investigation of לו'

We turn our attention now to לו', whose range of occurrences and range of forms show greater flexibility than that of עת.¹²⁸ It seems advantageous, then, to consider לו' with respect to its forms to observe whether any consistencies can be found in those uses. We will look separately at the singular (7 times) and plural (19 times) usages in both the absolute and construct states.

לו' as Singular Absolute (8:16; 12:3)

Only two of the seven singular uses of לו' occur in the absolute.

¹²⁸ The lexeme לו' occurs in eight chapters (2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12) compared to five for עת. But a more nuanced approach is to consider that לו' occurs in eighteen different units based, for example, on the outline produced by Fox, *Time to Tear Down*, while עת occurs only in nine.

Ecc1 8:17

This small section forms a “when...then” clause where Qoheleth’s observation in v. 16 reveals a conclusion in v. 17 that life under the sun is vast and unknowable. The search focuses on the business (ענין) done upon the earth, which involves a laborious intellectual pursuit.¹²⁹ The intensity of this search manifests itself in sleeplessness: ביום ובלילה שנה בעיניו איננו ראה.

The occurrence of יום alongside לילה suggests two halves of a 24 hour period.¹³⁰ In this case, יום simply designates the hours of daylight.

Ecc1 12:3

The sense of יום in this passage depends on the lens used to interpret it. If the poem is allegorical for the aging process, or metaphorical for some eschatological event, or more generally describes the march toward death, the expression ביום will take on a different nuance.¹³¹ Using Fox’s excellent proposal of appreciating the poem first on the literal level and then on the symbolic and figurative levels, we notice that on the literal level the section takes on characteristics of a funeral procession.¹³² At this level, ביום represents the day of the funeral.¹³³

¹²⁹ Jean-Jacques Lavoie, “Activité, sagesse et finitude humaine: étude de Qohélet 1,12-18,” *LTP* 61 (2007): 102.

¹³⁰ See Gershon Brin, *The Concept of Time in the Bible and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. F. García Martínez and P.W. Flint, STDJ (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 142 where this is one of the two uses of יום in the Hebrew Bible. The other use describes “brief time intervals.” He cites Num 11:19-20; Isa 48:6-7; Job 4:20-21 as examples. We will return to this question below.

¹³¹ See Bartholomew, *Ecclesiastes*, 346 for an overview of these positions. A more thorough critique of the allegorical position can be found in John F.A. Sawyer, “The Ruined House in Ecclesiastes 12: A Reconstruction of the Original Parable,” *JBL* 94 (1975): 519-31, and a critique of Sawyer and other proposals can be found in Michael V. Fox, “Aging and Death in Qoheleth 12,” *JSOT* 42 (1988): 56-59. More recently, H.A.J. Kruger in his article, “Old Age Frailty versus Cosmic Deterioration? A Few Remarks on the Interpretation of Qoheleth 11,7-12,8,” in *Qoheleth in the Context of Wisdom*, ed. Antoon Schoors, BETL 136 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1998), 399-411, revives the allegorical method applying it to an eschatological disaster in light of other ancient mythical texts. But he himself suggests that his findings are provisional (410), and we suggest that his proposal falls on the same difficulty of any allegorical proposal whereby no one system can account for every image.

¹³² Fox, “Aging and Death,” 59-63.

¹³³ Maurice Gilbert, “La description de la vieillesse en Qoheleth XII 1-7,” in *Congress Volume, Vienna 1980*, ed. J.A. Emerton, VTSup 32 (Leiden: Brill, 1981), 102 prefers to see this as a reference to a winter’s day. In this case, it still represents a physical entity rather than a metaphorical one.

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The exhortation of v. 1 (וּזְכֹר אֶת־בֹּרְאֶיךָ בַּיּוֹם בַּחֲרֻתֶיךָ)¹³⁴ is then followed by the rationale for this command. At its very basic level, the exhortation contrasts the days of youth (discussed below) with a day (בַּיּוֹם) wherein others take a day to remember a life. Whether this day is at the end of a period of old age and deteriorating health, or some general unpredictable day, the effect is still the same. There is a time forthcoming when the days of youth will be a memory and the efforts of youth will be undone without hope of a second childishness. Death (vv. 6-7) is the end of the scenario, and with it the cessation of influence and memory.

The use of יוֹם is not confined to either daylight hours or any twenty-four hour period, but is more generally referring to a limited time (an event) that marks a change of fortune.

יוֹם as Plural Absolute (8:13; 11:1)

Along with the two uses of the singular absolute, there are two further uses of the plural absolute at 8:13 and 11:1.

Ecc 8:13

The occurrence of יוֹמֵי in v. 13 places it in the difficult section of 8:9-14.¹³⁵ Here Qoheleth expresses his concern over some of the inequities he perceives in life with respect to the relative fortunes and misfortunes of the righteous and the wicked. In particular, Qoheleth questions the extent of retributive justice that occurs in the world. While it is possible to interpret Qoheleth's words as reflecting a divine cosmic retribution,¹³⁶ Qoheleth's frustration may run much deeper. While the divine retribution may be lacking, his concern certainly encompasses the lack of human justice that would mete out punishment upon oppressors.

¹³⁴ MT בֹּרְאֶיךָ. The form appears to be a plural, "your creators." This has given rise to a number of proposals including the use of a "plural of majesty," the word is based on the formation of III-ת rather than III-א morphology, or that it requires emendation. See Gordis, *Man and His World*, 330 for a summary of the positions. The LXX and most commentators understand it as singular, "your creator."

¹³⁵ Fox, *Time to Tear Down*, 274 begins the unit at v. 10 suggesting that אֶת־כָּל־זֶה refers to the previous statements about authority. At the same time, however, אֶת־כָּל־זֶה occurs twice in 9:1, and the presence of the relative marker אֲשֶׁר suggests that what follows is the referent of אֶת־כָּל־זֶה. In his explanation of 9:1, Fox suggests the כִּי introduces an evidential clause similar to "I am led to say all this by the fact that..." (290). Clearly this makes the אֶת־כָּל־זֶה look forward rather than looking backward. Since this is the case in 9:1, we can take this as a possibility for 8:9. In the case of 8:9, אֶת־כָּל־זֶה refers to Qoheleth's observations about what is going on under the sun.

¹³⁶ See the mention of God in v. 12.

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There appears to be a contrast in these verses between what Qoheleth has observed (וְרָאִיתִי v. 9) and what he professes to know (כִּי גַם־יִידַע אֲנִי v. 12). The force of the כִּי גַם in this case is likely “although, even though”¹³⁷ that sets a dichotomy between experience and belief. In this case, Qoheleth knows, rather than experiences, that for those who fear God it will go well (v. 12) and for the wicked (v. 13) it will not go well and וְלֹא־יֵאָרֶךְ יָמִים כַּצֶּל (“and he will not lengthen days like a shadow”).¹³⁸

The use of יָמִים in this case is a reference to the ongoing life of the evil doer. The comparison to כַּצֶּל brings to mind a life that apparently goes on and on without a definable end.¹³⁹ Thus, יָמִים represents a length of time without definitive boundaries but it is tied to an individual human lifespan.

Eccl 11:1

Qoheleth considers the certainties and uncertainties of life with respect to one’s work ethic in 11:1-6. Due to uncertainty (11:1-2, 5-6), one should be cautious. There are some certainties: clouds bring rain, objects remain where they fall, and those who spend too much time daydreaming will discover poverty (vv. 3-4). The juxtaposition of vv. 1-2 and vv. 3-4 may serve as counterbalances to relying to a great extent on what one considers certain. While sending “bread upon the waters” is not a familiar Hebrew expression, there are other parallels that suggest the nature of the image is the spread of generosity.¹⁴⁰ The reference to בָּרַב הַיָּמִים appears clear

¹³⁷ HALOT, s.v. כִּי, 12. One should note, however, that Fox raises an objection to this use of כִּי גַם (Fox, *Time to Tear Down*, 286) suggesting rather that it draws attention to a concomitant fact like וְגַם. Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 288 is just as adamant that it is concessive.

¹³⁸ MT כַּצֶּל. LXX has ἐν σκιᾷ, which both Goldman (BHQ, 102*) and Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 288 deem a secondary reading, as MT is supported by the Vulgate, Syriac, and Targum.

¹³⁹ Again, opinion is divided. Fox, *Time to Tear Down*, 286 prefers to read כַּצֶּל as parenthetical to the negative clause with the sense that “and, like a shadow, he will not live long.” Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 156 suggests that the operating metaphor is the “lengthening of a shadow as the sun goes down.”

¹⁴⁰ Fox, *Time to Tear Down*, 311-12 overviews the four interpretative possibilities. He suggests that the act of charity and giving assistance to those in need has parallels in the literature. Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 342-43 draws a similar conclusion and also makes mention of other, though later, statements that use similar imagery. Both mention the Egyptian *Instruction of Ankhsheshonq* of the Ptolemaic period: “Do a good deed and throw it in the water; when it dries you will find it.” (See Miriam Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature: A Book of Readings*, 3 vols. III: The Late Period [London: University of California Press, 1980], 174). In this case, the saying is surrounded by other proverbs concerned with helping, such as “Sweeter is the water of him who has given it than the wine of him [who has received] it.” See also H. Lewy, “Parallelen zu antiken Sprichwörtern und Apophthegmen,” *Philologus* 58 (1899): 80-81 for references to similar images in medieval Greek texts as well as Goethe, Turkish, and Arabic proverbs.

enough.¹⁴¹ The days are specified as those days that immediately follow, and this restricts the temporal timescale to a period of indeterminate, but not vast, length. While the meaning of the metaphor may envisage a length of time greater than a few days, the image itself demands that the time be measured in terms of days rather than in terms of years or decades.

In these two uses of the plural absolute, the length of time depicted by יָמִים is not strictly defined. But like many time related terms in the Hebrew Bible, time is presented relative to others. In these two cases, יָמִים is a length of time rather than a moment or singular event ranging from several days (11:1) to the remainder of an individual's life (8:13).

יָמִים as Singular Construct (7:1c; 7:1d; 7:14a; 7:14b; 8:8)

The five uses of the singular construct of יָמִים occur in only three contexts, all of which exhibit aphoristic character. This is not surprising since one finds frequent use of יָמִים in the Book of Proverbs.¹⁴²

7:1c and d

While there are undoubtedly ties between the aphorisms in chapter 7, such as the frequent use of צַדִּיק, צַדִּק, טוֹבָה, and טוֹב, the connection is loose.¹⁴³ Our examination of the term יָמִים, then, needs only focus on the verses in which it occurs.

Qoheleth offers here a number of aphorisms that contain a surprising twist. While Prov 22:1a offers a parallel for Eccl 7:1a,b (נִבְחַר שֵׁם מֵעֶשֶׂר רֶבֶב “A name is to be chosen from great riches”), the second half of Eccl 7:1 is not familiar from

¹⁴¹ The phrase has eschatological overtones elsewhere. In two other uses of רַב יָמִים at Isa 24:22 and Zech 8:4, the topic is some far off day of reckoning. In Isaiah, the topic is בְּיוֹם הַהוּא (v. 21) and following a description of the imprisonments that follows “that day” the prophet declares that וְאַחֲרֵי יָמִים יִפְקְדוּ (“and after many days they will be punished”). In Zechariah, the reference is to great age as a promise of God's blessing upon Zion. The זִקְנִיּוֹת and זִקְנִים in Jerusalem will be of such an age (מֵרַב יָמִים) that they will require a support staff to walk. Again the expression is indefinite due perhaps to the hypothetical nature of the example and to the fact that these many days encompass the whole of an individual's lifespan. The use in Ecclesiastes, however, is definite given the presence of the definite article. See W-O §9.7a, which indicates the definiteness of the phrase is shown by the definite article on the genitive rather than the construct.

¹⁴² Certainly יָמִים is one of the more familiar lexemes in the book of Proverbs occurring 32 times there.

¹⁴³ Fox, *Time to Tear Down*, 250 suggests the first six verses form a unit based on the notion of what is good. Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 242, on the other hand, gives the title “What is Good” to the first twelve verses.

other Hebrew literature. Certainly there are other instances where the day of birth symbolizes difficulty rather than joy (e.g., Ezek 16:4,5 and Job 3:3), but these are isolated occurrences compared with the more sweeping generalization of Qoheleth. The elevation of the **יום המות** over the **יום הולדו** fits well with Qoheleth's gritty view of life, but its link to a good name is not entirely clear.

The sense of **יום** in this case is close to that of **עת**, though with a subtle difference. While the **עת רעה** of 9:12 is that defining moment when a person is caught by unfortunately circumstance, the juxtaposition of **יום המות** and **יום הולדו** indicates a concern for the circumstances surrounding the death/birth than with the timing/duration. The point of comparison is the reversal of feelings generally associated with birth and death. In vv. 2,3, and 4 the issue is attitude so that the attitude of mourning is better than mirth and laughter. The point of issue in 7:1, then, is not the timing but the advantage of living with the same sense of seriousness that accompanies the losing of a loved one rather than the joy (perhaps even giddiness) that accompanies the birth of someone dear.¹⁴⁴ The use of **יום** in this case is the time surrounding the event of death and birth measured, likely, as the hours surrounding said event.

Eccl 7:14a and b

Together 7:13-14 forms a little cluster examining human activity in light of the divine. The proverb in v. 13 is similar to 1:15, which expresses human powerlessness in the face of divine action. In light of this,¹⁴⁵ v. 14 considers the real-to-life situation that there are good days and bad days existing side-by-side.

Conceptually, the distinction between a **יום רעה** and a **יום טובה** is the sum of events within the time period given by **יום**. In general, when events are positively

¹⁴⁴ The parallelism is not precise given that in the first case **יום** forms a construct with a noun while in the second with a Niphal infinitive construct. **יום הולדו** "the day of his being born = the day of one's being born" indicates a more personal sense to the phrase; that is, it is not just any birth-day or death-day in view, but rather that the day of one's own death is better than the day of one's own birth. Isolated from its context it may indicate that it is favourable to die than to be born. While Qoheleth indicates as much in other contexts (e.g., 4:2-3), the context here is one of favourable attitudes rather than the benefit of non-existence. Also, the need to posit some extended meaning to the notion of one's name is here rejected. Thus, Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 243-44 would posit that "name" here has an extended meaning of one's reputation that is supposed to survive beyond death in the same stream of thought as Isa 56:6, **שם עולם**. But the proverb of 7:1 precludes such a far-reaching sense given that a good name is better than precious ointment. How would precious ointment benefit one after death? The sense of a "good name" in this case is certainly within the span of one's own lifetime.

¹⁴⁵ Thus, the addition of "so" to the beginning of v. 14 (NJPSV).

perceived, it is a **יום טובה**. Qoheleth's example invites the reader to reflect that these two time periods can exist side-by-side, and that it is possible to move back and forth between them. It is not strictly necessary, then, to suggest that **יום** strictly represents a 24 hour period, but rather a brief duration of time into which events are able to take place. In this way, **יום** remains distinct from an event itself, which can be represented better by **עת**.

Eccl 8:8

At the end of the unit examining obedience to a king (8:1-8), we encounter four negative statements (three using **אין** and one with **לא**) corresponding to the four **כי** statements of vv. 6-7 reflecting on the effects of being wise in the king's court. The four **כי** statements deal specifically with what the wise individual knows, while the four negative counterparts expand the discussion to describe what no one can do. First, no one rules over the wind. Qoheleth does not have in mind here the ability to use the wind or to protect oneself from the wind, but specifically no one has the power **לכלוא את־הרוח** ("to restrain the wind").¹⁴⁶ Second, there is no one with authority over the "day of death" (**ביום המות**), to which we will return momentarily.

Third, Qoheleth declares **אין משלחת במלחמה**. Two difficulties confront the reader here. The first is the use of **משלחת**, which occurs elsewhere only in Ps 78:49 in the phrase **משלחת מלאכי רעים**. Commenting upon Ps 78, Tate suggests that "a sending of messengers/angels" is a literal translation, but opts for "a band of angels of calamity" in his translation.¹⁴⁷ So, too, do Weiser ("company of destroying angels")¹⁴⁸ and Dahood ("an escort of his pestiferous angels") render **משלחת** as a group.¹⁴⁹ HALOT also suggests "troop, band" for Ps 78:49, while advocating "release" for Eccl 8:8.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁶ The term **רוח** could simply be "wind", or it may refer to the "breath which supports life" (HALOT, s.v. **רוח**, 6). As the remaining negative statements in v. 8 deal with destruction and violence (**מות**, **מלחמה**, **לֹא־יִמְלֹךְ רָשָׁע אֶת־בְּעַל־יוֹ**), the connection of **רוח** with the breath of life is warranted. So Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 276 and Fox, *Time to Tear Down*, 280.

¹⁴⁷ Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 51-100*, WBC 20 (Dallas: Word Books, 1990), 283 and 279.

¹⁴⁸ Artur Weiser, *The Psalms, a commentary*, trans. Herbert Hartwell, OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), 536.

¹⁴⁹ Mitchell J. Dahood, *Psalms II, 51-100*, AB 17 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1968), 237.

¹⁵⁰ HALOT, s.v. **משלחת**.

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The majority of commentators on Eccl 8:8 advocate something approaching “discharge” for מִשַּׁל חַת, however, rather than a reference to a company of group sent into battle.¹⁵¹ Fox does mention the approach of the medieval commentator Rashbam, who advanced the understanding that מִשַּׁל חַת represented “a delegation of his [the king’s] soldiers to do battle with the angel of death”. Fox rejects this as “far-fetched” though it is unclear whether it is מִשַּׁל חַת as a delegation that is far-fetched, or whether the insertion of the battle against the angel of death prompts this judgement.¹⁵²

One must consider the sense of מִשַּׁל חַת, however, in light of the following phrase, בְּמַל חַמָּה, representing the second difficulty. The first two members of the quartet of negative statements both contained the proposition וְ rendered as “over.” In both of these cases, there is a direct reference to a power relationship so the rendering of וְ by “over” is quite natural. The power element seems to be missing in the third leg of the comparison containing the disputed term מִשַּׁל חַת. Or is it? Each successive leg of the negative quatrain, with the exception of the fourth having a different form entirely, has become shorter. While the first line spells out both the negative condition (“There is no man having power over the wind”) and the result (“to restrain the wind”), the second line lacks the result, though it could certainly be added (to restrain the day of death). So it should not be surprising that in the third line the notion of power should be left out in the name of economy, since it has already been given a dominant place in the first two lines.¹⁵³ A suitable rendering would then be “there is no company (having authority) over the battle.”¹⁵⁴ The sense, then, is that just as the wind cannot be restrained and the day of death is not controllable, neither is a battle decided by any one group according to its aims or goals. The ancient world in general, and the Hebrew Bible in particular, is filled with stories of battles that did not go according to plan.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵¹ In the judgement of Schoors, *Preacher, Part II*, 400.

¹⁵² Fox, *Time to Tear Down*, 281.

¹⁵³ Kamano, *Cosmology*, 38 suggests this same technique also exists for the vanity sayings of 1:14b, 1:17b and 2:1b.

¹⁵⁴ The interpretation of Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 282, who suggests מִשַּׁל חַת has the sense of “deputation” rather than exemption or discharge, only works if בְּמַל חַמָּה is a euphemism for the day of death. The context would allow this equation, but it by no means requires it, and Seow himself admits that references to “human struggle with death as a battle” (283) are absent from the Hebrew Bible.

¹⁵⁵ See, for example, the assault of Sennacherib’s forces on Jerusalem in Isa 36-39 [2 Kgs 18:13-20:19].

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The fourth line offers a similar kind of comparison using a different kind of construction. Here, a verb is the recipient of the negation, but the issue is still that of power. Wickedness is unable to deliver (Piel of מלם) its master.¹⁵⁶

The reference to יום המות refers quite generally to the time of death. Yet, the timing of death seems less in view than the inevitability of death. In context, this verse concerning human powerlessness fits well with Qoheleth's immediately prior advice for a wise person not to be slow to carry out the will of a king. The wise person understands that all actions are limited and fall under judgement, including those of the king (vv. 5-6). The wise also has an appreciation for the wickedness of humanity (v. 6) and that the future is impenetrable (v. 7). The more general observations of v. 8 are certainly not meant to be outside the viewpoint of the wise. Instead, Qoheleth has now inserted himself into this position of the wise person to declare what a wise person will generally hold true: human beings are ultimately powerless. The wise person, whether facing an unfavourable circumstance before a monarch or facing life in general, must resign him/herself to the fact that there are many circumstances beyond his/her control.

In these cases of the singular construct of יום, it represents an indefinite, though relatively brief, period of time. In contrast to עת, however, it signifies timing rather than the event itself. In the case of death, for example, Qoheleth can refer to the עת למות (there is a moment to die) in 3:2, which is contrasted to the act of giving birth (עת ללדת). Both of these are transitions occurring in an instant since one cannot be “half-way born” or “half dead” despite the common use of the latter. The use of יום המות in 7:1, however, stands in contrast with the יום הולדו (“day of being born,” a Niphal construct). The issue here is not the moment of being born or the moment of dying, but the feelings created in those participating and/or observing said events. These may be of short duration, but certainly longer than the moments at issue in 3:2. For this reason, we suggest יום as a short duration word, but עת as focused upon the event itself.

¹⁵⁶ HALOT, s.v. מלם, 1. The verb occurs three times in Ecclesiastes. Here and in 9:15 it occurs in the Piel with the sense of “to deliver, save.” It occurs also in 7:26 in the Niphal “one who pleases God escapes her [the woman who is a trap].”

יום as Modified Plural or Plural Construct

The most common use of יום in Ecclesiastes is as a modified or construct plural. To these seventeen uses we now turn looking at each according to the word with which it stands in relationship.

With הבאים (2:16)

Qoheleth muses about the relative value of wisdom and folly stating in 2:16 that:

כי אין זכרון לחכם עם הכסיל לעולם בשכבר הימים הבאים
הכל נשכח ואיך ימות החכם עם הכסיל:

Qoheleth laments the lack of distinction between the wise and the fool with respect to their memory in subsequent generations.¹⁵⁷ So while Qoheleth exclaims that in the future (לעולם) there will be no remembrance of the wise or fools, in a sense this cannot hope to be undone since “already in the coming days everything is forgotten” (בשכבר הימים הבאים הכל נשכח).¹⁵⁸ There is something external to the efforts of humans that makes this enduring remembrance impossible as if it has *already* occurred in the future.

Qoheleth’s use of מות in this case is quite interesting. While the mention of מות in conjunction with the singular construct of יום above dealt with the time of physical death, the use of מות in this context is not the cessation of physical life, but the absence of “existence” in the form of memory. For Qoheleth, the tragedy of physical death would be mitigated if there were some means of controlling either one’s material possessions (v. 12) or the memory of one’s accomplishments. Lack of existence comes when both physical life and its traces have disappeared.¹⁵⁹

In this context, הימים הבאים looks toward the distant future acting in parallel with לעולם but emphasising the process leading up to this future rather than the end-product. It is iterative demonstrating that in the constant movement of time

¹⁵⁷ As Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 136 suggests, quite correctly, that there is likely a deliberate tension between the use of שכבר and הימים הבאים. The tension here serves to highlight its certainty; it will happen because it has already happened.

¹⁵⁸ Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 136 points out that the mixing of temporal directions is likely deliberate, and suggests that “all too soon” may approximate the sense here.

¹⁵⁹ This is contra Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, 22 who suggests that “one should not think that Qoheleth would have been satisfied with a remembrance that would never die.”

memories are lost. The combination with כִּבְר serves two purposes. On the one hand, it makes the statement more certain by pushing the reality back before the event takes place (i.e., as if it were real now). On the other hand, it serves to make the sense repetitive since this “already” happens in the same way in the death of every person whether wise or foolish.

With חֲשַׁךְ (5:16, 11:8)

There are two occurrences of יָמִים combined with חֲשַׁךְ. The first occurrence is at 5:16 in the unit of 5:12-16, which deals with a hypothetical individual, an “everyman,” who would be the recipient of Qoheleth’s pity. The passage provides the exegete with a number of interpretive questions. First, how are the two items characterized as a “sick evil” (רַעַה חוּלָה) in vv. 12 and 15 related? Are they separate ills, or is the second a more generalized expansion of the first? Second, vv. 12-16 are littered with third person references, but the subject of these references is not entirely clear. Is the subject to be the father, the son, the riches (עֲשָׂר), or perhaps a combination of two or three of these? Third, how is the reader to understand the notion of “going” (הֵלֵךְ) in vv. 14 and 15? Are these euphemisms for death, or simply an indication of continuance from a certain point onwards? All of these choices to a greater or lesser extent reflect on how we read בְּחֲשָׁךְ בְּיָמָיו.

First, do the two occurrences of רַעַה חוּלָה form two distinct observations, or merely one observation with two components? The NJPSV moves בְּחֲשָׁךְ בְּיָמָיו וְגַם־זֶה רַעַה חוּלָה to the beginning of v. 14 “for clarity.”¹⁶⁰ If this were the case, then Qoheleth would be remarking on two separate misfortunes: one who has wealth and loses it, and one who departs life just as impoverished as the day of birth. But it immediately becomes clear that this can hardly be the case. Vv. 12-13 speaks of a very specific case of an individual who loses his wealth, while the second “sick evil” is universal rather than specific. For that reason, it seems appropriate to see the first more specific observation leading to a second observation that, while more universal, comes about through that same individual who experienced the financial loss. The movement of וְגַם־זֶה רַעַה חוּלָה to another location is neither necessary nor desirable.

¹⁶⁰ See footnote g-g of 5:14. Michael V. Fox, *Ecclesiastes* קהלת, The JPS Bible Commentary (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2004), 37 remarks that while “NJPS has moved this sentence for clarity...it is not the way Koheleth segments his description.”

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Second, the referents of the verbs must be determined. It is necessary, then, to move our way through vv. 12-16 to determine at each junction who the referent may be. Our first query is toward the end of v. 12: **עֲשֶׂה שְׁמֹר לְבַעֲלָיו לְרַעְתּוֹ**. The passive complicates the reading allowing the riches to be kept either by its master or for its master.¹⁶¹ While the former is more likely, the passive does take the emphasis away from the owner and places it upon the riches themselves. It is for this reason that the 3ms suffix on **לְרַעְתּוֹ** should refer not to the owner but to the riches. This is further confirmed since the subject of the next active verb (**אֶבֶד**) is the riches rather than the owner.¹⁶² Retaining the 3ms suffix as referring to the riches also connects the passage to what is held in 11:2. The retention of wealth brings harm to that wealth. Distributing the wealth is an act of wisdom. On the other hand, there is no context provided in Ecclesiastes to understand how the retention of riches brings about the owner's harm, except in the pathetic situation that follows. The relationship between v. 12b (retaining riches) and v. 13 would be unclear at best. The use of a *waw explicativum* on v. 13 does not clarify the sense relationship between the two verses; it only clarifies the grammar.¹⁶³ How can retaining wealth harm its owners? A better explanation would be to read v. 12b as referring to the calamity overtaking wealth that is retained. Rather than keeping it safe, retaining it cuts the wealth off from its ability to work. The subsequent phrase (**וְאֶבֶד הָעֶשֶׂר** ו**אֶבֶד הָעֶשֶׂר**) explains the next step in the tragedy: “and those riches perished in an evil affair.” In this case, the relationship between the two phrases is a sequential conjunction: this happened and then this happened.

While v. 13 begins with a continued reference to the riches, the owner (**בַּעַל**) in Qoheleth's example re-emerges in v. 13 with the bearing of the son (**וְהוֹלִיד בֵּן**). The following phrase, **וְאֵין בִּידוֹ מְאוֹמָה**, contains some ambiguity. Does the

¹⁶¹ Joüon-Muraoka §132f indicating that the “ל of relation is used with a passive verb to indicate *to whom*, as its *author*, the action relates” in agreement with Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 206. On the other hand, Esth 3:11 reads **הַכֶּסֶף נָתַן לָךְ** (“the silver is given to you”) or 1 Chr 6:33 **וְאֶחָיהֶם הַלְוִיִּם** (“and their brothers, the Levites, were given for all the service of the tabernacle”). Norbert Lohfink, “Kohélet und die Banken: Zur Übersetzung von Kohélet V 12-16,” *VT* 39 (1989): 491 suggests that the passive formulation can indicate that the riches are not kept by the owner but by an unknown party (a “bank”).

¹⁶² Thus vv. 13-14a become, “riches are kept by its owners to the detriment (of the riches),¹⁴ and those riches perish in an ill adventure.” Lohfink, “Kohélet und die Banken,” 491 has also suggested this reading.

¹⁶³ Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 206 proposes this understanding of the *waw* following GKC§154a note 1b.

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“hand” belong to the son or the father?¹⁶⁴ Retaining the father as the object of the רעה חולה appears to have less gaps in the story. There is no apparent reason why the loss of wealth by the father should effectively condemn the son forever so he “shall carry away nothing in his toil” (לא־ישא בעמלו). The son’s role in the story is to highlight how far the “evil affair” (ענין רע) has placed the family finances in jeopardy; the son’s fortune will have to be built by his own hand since nothing can be given to him. The remainder of vv. 14-16 have the father in view. While recognizing that we cannot be definitive, the changing subjects as they are proposed here makes good sense of passage.

The third consideration for explaining this passage is the use of הלך (v. 14). Is it a euphemism for death or does it mean more generally “to go (about life).”¹⁶⁵ The use of בוא and הלך together have led some to claim that the text deals with the span of one’s life.¹⁶⁶ One can take issue with Seow’s claim that Qoheleth “uses the root *hlc* “to go” to speak of death (3:20; 5:14-15 [Eng vv 15-16]; 6:6, 9; 7:2; 9:10; 12:5). This is particularly true when *hlc* “to go” is coordinated with *bw*’ “to come,” which signifies birth (5:14-15 [Eng vv 15-16]; 6:4).”¹⁶⁷ The two verbs occur together five times.¹⁶⁸ Of these, 8:10 is ambiguous at best, but does not appear to use בוא and הלך as euphemisms for birth and death.¹⁶⁹ On the other hand, 1:4 certainly implies birth and death albeit for a whole generation rather than an individual. The most fitting parallel for 5:14-15 is 6:4. This is all the more important given the chiasmic features that scholars, such as Seow and Fredericks, have noticed.¹⁷⁰ But what is not commented upon is the nuance. If the sense of הנפל is the stillborn

¹⁶⁴ The ambiguity has been noted by Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 221. So too Daniel C. Fredericks, “Chiasm and Parallel Structure in Qoheleth 5:6-6:9,” *JBL* 108 (1989): 25 who believes the reference is to the son, and Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, 52 who believes the reference is to the father, among others.

¹⁶⁵ So Lohfink, “Kohelet und die Banken,” 492 in his translation, “Wie er aus dem Schoß seiner Mutter herausgekommen ist, nackt muß er von neuem seinen Lebensweg beginnen - genau so, wie er herausgekommen ist.”

¹⁶⁶ So Fredericks, “Chiasm and Parallel Structure,” 25.

¹⁶⁷ Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 106.

¹⁶⁸ Eccl 1:4; 5:14-15; 6:4; 8:10.

¹⁶⁹ The translation by Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 276 of this difficult verse is “Thereupon I saw the wicked <brought> to burial, and they proceeded from a holy place; but those who have acted justly were discarded in the city. This, too, is vanity.” While death is a part of the overall picture, the terms בוא and הלך convey nothing of birth and death.

¹⁷⁰ Both Fredericks, “Chiasm and Parallel Structure,” 25 and Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 217 pair 5:14-15 with 6:3-4.

child, as parallels in Ps 58:9 and Job 3:16 suggest, who “never sees the sun” then it makes little sense to look at בּוֹא and הָלַךְ in these cases to represent birth and death. The sense is that of movement: movement from the womb and movement to the tomb. It is the reference to בַּחֲשֶׁךְ that allows the reader to know the direction of the movement signified by הָלַךְ.

As far as הָלַךְ being used to indicate death, this is certainly the case in 3:20, 6:6, 9:10 and 12:5, as Seow has suggested.¹⁷¹ On the other hand, הָלַךְ occurs 30 times in Qoheleth with some instances plainly meaning simply moving about.¹⁷² So there appears to be little that necessitates seeing either בּוֹא or הָלַךְ as referring to the spectrum of life and death. In this case, vv. 14-15 describe the father as having nothing more after his financial loss than he had when he was born naked, and he returns to living his life after the birth of his son having received nothing from his hard work. What may be intended here is to demonstrate how selfish the father truly is given that all his days he eats “in darkness, and in much vexation and sickness and anger.”¹⁷³ Even though he has a son, it is the עֵינֵי רָע that determines how his days are lived out.

The manner in which we have constructed the tale here, the temporal expression כָּל־יָמָיו references the “all his days”; that is, the remaining days that follow the loss of his riches. These days are spent בַּחֲשֶׁךְ, which does not directly modify יָמָיו as it does in our second example (11:8) below, but instead modifies how one eats. In this case, חָשַׁךְ is paralleled by three other phrases: כַּעַס הָרַבָּה (“much vexation”), חָלָיו (“sickness”), and קִצְף (“anger”). Darkness here, then, represents some sort of frustration that comes upon a man that darkens his spirit. Elsewhere, darkness can be a euphemism for death (6:4), but this sense appears to be restricted to this one verse. In the poem of 12:3-7, the verb חָשַׁךְ does not refer to

¹⁷¹ Seow’s use of 6:9 as an example of הָלַךְ as death is puzzling at first glance, but it is justified because no better answer is possible, and הָלַךְ occurs elsewhere as a euphemism for death (215). We think this works if one holds to Seow’s other examples, but we think it is safer not to suppose הָלַךְ refers to the process of dying unless the destination suggests this as a possibility. The inclusion of 7:2 as an example is perhaps more puzzling, since the one going is not the one who died but the one who is there to mourn the one who died.

¹⁷² For example, 4:15 רָאִיתִי אֶת־כָּל־הַחַיִּים הַמְהֻלְכִים תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ (“I saw all the living moving about under the sun...”), or הוֹלֵךְ אֶל־דָּרוֹם וְסוּבֵב אֶל־צָפוֹן סוּבֵב סָבִב הוֹלֵךְ הָרוּחַ (“[The wind] blowing to the south, and going around to the north; round and round goes the wind”).

¹⁷³ LXX reads ἐν σκοτει καὶ ἐν πένθει suggesting the translators read וְאֵבֶל for יָאֵבֶל, or, as Goldman (BHQ, 86*) suggests, perhaps וְבֵאֵבֶל given the presence of the second ἐν. MT has the support of the Vulgate and Targum.

dying whether the poem is interpreted symbolically or figuratively. The notion of darkness does not serve one consistent function in Ecclesiastes. The מִיָּמִים under consideration indicates a period of indeterminate length, but makes up (presumably) a significant portion of adult life.

In 11:8, the connection between מִיָּמִים and חֹשֶׁךְ is more syntactically direct. Here חֹשֶׁךְ plus the definite article stand in a genitival relationship with the construct form of מִיָּמִים. The days in view are those particular days characterized by a lack of enjoyment and pleasure.

There are two options for the expression אֶת־יְמֵי הַחֹשֶׁךְ. Either it refers to something within the lifespan of an individual, or it represents a time following death. The context of the verse is important for this determination as v. 8 stands within the larger unit of 11:7-12:8.¹⁷⁴ Ogden has noted that the meaning of the temporal expressions שָׁנִים הַרְבֵּה (“many years”) and אֶת־יְמֵי הַחֹשֶׁךְ (“the days of darkness”) are “to be established by reference to the temporal phrases which form part of the elaboration of the theme in xi 9-xii 1.”¹⁷⁵ In other words, the content of these temporal expressions must be obtained by paying close attention to the elaboration that follows. Much of Ogden’s argument, however, depends on חֹשֶׁךְ being a reference to death.¹⁷⁶ He then goes on to suggest that the contrast in 12:1 cannot be that of youth versus old age, but that:

In the contrast between light, the symbol of life, and darkness, we conclude that darkness and evil are co-ordinate terms for death. Thus the absence of possible pleasure is not merely descriptive of difficult times...but is a way of speaking of the minimal existence which one enjoys in Sheol.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁴ Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 182 as well as Graham S. Ogden, “Qoheleth XI 7-XII 8: Qoheleth’s Summons to Enjoyment and Reflection,” *VT* 34 (1984): 28. Ogden’s research has shown that there is a structural strategy in some of Qoheleth’s units whereby Qoheleth identifies the themes of the entire unit in the first few verses.

¹⁷⁵ Ogden, “Qoheleth XI 7-XII 8,” 29. Almost all the lexemes from 11:7-8 occur again in 11:9-12:8. See the helpful chart in Schwienhorst-Schönberger, *Kohelet*, 517.

¹⁷⁶ Ogden, “Qoheleth XI 7-XII 8,” 30.

¹⁷⁷ Ogden, “Qoheleth XI 7-XII 8,” 34. Ogden is here using Sawyer, “Ruined House,” 523 who points out that it is unlikely that the reference to חֹשֶׁךְ is a euphemism for old age because, “this is not a subject in which Qoheleth appears to have been particularly interested.” Of course, until the statements of 11:9 and 12:1, it does not appear that Qoheleth was particularly interested in the topic of youth either unless one takes into account the lad (יָלֵד) in 4:12-15 who is contrasted to the old (זָקֵן) and foolish king.

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The contrast, however, between light and dark is not as compelling as Ogden suggests. For example, the contrast also exists in 2:13-14 as fitting the contrast between wisdom/a wise man and folly/a fool. Furthermore, חֹשֶׁךְ certainly is not a euphemism for death throughout Ecclesiastes.

The lexeme חֹשֶׁךְ as a noun occurs six times in five verses, while the verb form occurs twice. The two uses that comes closest to representing death are those in 6:4.¹⁷⁸ These two occurrences deal with the stillborn child (נֶפֶל). The stillborn comes in הֵבֵל and goes out in חֹשֶׁךְ. The sense is not that the stillborn comes out dead and then slides into death for that would be nonsensical. Rather, the whole discussion about the stillborn revolves around its comparison with an individual of fertility and longevity (vv. 1-3). This contrast requires חֹשֶׁךְ to symbolize lack of accomplishment rather than death. The individual of vv. 1-3 had a great deal but lacked satisfaction (שָׁבַע). The נֶפֶל had nothing and accomplished nothing, but did not experience the difficulties of this life either. In the scales of Qoheleth's judgement, a lack of satisfaction outweighs both fertility and longevity.

In no case is the equation of חֹשֶׁךְ and death necessary. In the discussion of 11:9-12:7, it seems best to designate the יְמֵי הַחֹשֶׁךְ as Qoheleth's reference to the time in one's life where living becomes difficult and enjoyment has passed.¹⁷⁹ While length of life is one benefit of wisdom in Proverbs,¹⁸⁰ Qoheleth counters that length of life is only valuable if it is enjoyed. Enjoyment of one's years is all the more advisable if one considers oneself as a being-toward-death and that the days of darkness (אֶת־יְמֵי הַחֹשֶׁךְ) will be manifold.

With this understanding, then, יְמֵים measures an indefinite period of time not exceeding the days of one's life. Qoheleth's use of הַרְבֵּה as a descriptor of this period gives the sense that compared to the good days of enjoyment, these days of

¹⁷⁸ Of the other four uses, one clearly refers to literal darkness (2:13). In 2:14, it is again applied to the כְּסִיל, but it symbolises the inability of the כְּסִיל to behave appropriate to the way of wisdom while the חָכָם is said to have "his eyes in his head" (עֵינָיו בְּרֹאשׁוֹ). In 5:16, it occurs in conjunction with קֶצֶף, חָלִי, and כְּעֵם הַרְבֵּה. The last use is the one under consideration in 11:8.

¹⁷⁹ There is nothing in the use of יְמֵי הַחֹשֶׁךְ כִּי־הַרְבֵּה יִהְיוּ that prevents it from being within the days of life rather than at the end of the days of light. Thus, just as 7:14 suggests the intertwining of good days and evil days, the dark days could be intertwined with the good days. In 12:1, the יְמֵי הָרַעָה appear to be sequential following the days of youth, and certainly in the context of the funeral imagery of 12:1-5, this is likely the case. However, it is helpful to challenge the assumptions of purely sequential thinking that often are associated with this section.

¹⁸⁰ See length of life as a gift of wisdom in 3:2 and 9:11, and a result of the fear of the Lord in 10:27.

difficulty will be long but it would be impossible to give relative proportions. Qoheleth's advice is to live in anticipation of these days by making the most of the present.

With רעה (12:1b) and with בחורות (11:9; 12:1)

In the same section as the previous ימי החשך, Qoheleth makes three additional uses of the plural of ימים. In one case it is used in conjunction with רעה and in the other two with בחורות. Considering their proximity and use in conjunction with one another, it seems wise to include these instances together.

Qoheleth's reference to "in the days of your youth" (בימי בחורותך) takes place in the context of the exhortation to remember "before" (עד אשר לא) the ימי הרעה come.¹⁸¹ The ימי הרעה stands parallel with והגיעו שנים ("and the years arrive"), which is further modified with אשר תאמר אינלי בהם חפץ ("when you will say, 'There is not pleasure in them for me'").

The reference to ימי הרעה is set in contrast to the ימי בחורותך. It cannot be a reference to the time of death and beyond, since one requires the ability to say "There is no pleasure in them for me," which is not possible in the dark place of death (9:5). The ימי הרעה thus represents some indeterminate time foreseen by Qoheleth where one's capacity for enjoyment diminishes. Perhaps this time is "old age" but need not be limited to it, though there is likely a component of this given the contrast with "days of your youth." The onset of these ימי הרעה is well along the path of life.

The duration of these days is also not strictly defined though the funeral image in 12:1-7 suggests this time is not confined to one's lifetime and its parallel temporal word, שנים, suggests a significant length of time.

This period stands in contrast with the ימי בחורותיך of 11:9 and 12:1.¹⁸² Qoheleth's imperative for a youth (בחור) to enjoy youthfulness following the desires of the heart and the vision of the eyes recalls Qoheleth's own journey in 2:10: "All things that my eyes desired, I did not refuse them." He treated his heart in a

¹⁸¹ While עד אשר is commonly "until," the use here includes a pleonastic לא. This is unique in the Hebrew Bible. See the short discussion in Schoors, *Preacher, Part I*, 145.

¹⁸² See Schoors, *Preacher, Part I*, 32-33 for a brief discussion on the orthographical difference between the two forms.

similar fashion: “I did not restrain my heart from any pleasure.” Qoheleth presents this enjoyment as a duty for the youth should “know that on account of all these things God will bring you into judgment.” Longman treats this as a negative statement through the use of the adversative “but.” It suggests that a youth may experience enjoyment *but* needs to do it in such a way as to be mindful of future judgement. A young person should experience enjoyment, but not too much.¹⁸³

On the other hand, Qoheleth bluntly suggests that one who has much and yet does not enjoy the good things that God has given is wasteful. Twice Qoheleth comments that to eat and drink or enjoy one’s riches is a “gift of God” (3:12-13; 5:18). The good life embraces enjoyment as part of God’s goodness to humanity. With this in view, Qoheleth’s imperatives may point away from “enjoy yourself, but not too much” toward “Enjoy yourself, for God judges you according to these (aforementioned) categories.” Failure to enjoy what God has given is an affront against his creation and is to be avoided.

The **ימי בחור** in this case represents a mature phase of life beyond childhood. A survey of the uses of **בחור** in the Hebrew Bible shows that it can represent a group in the same way as **בתולה** (“young woman”), **זקן** (“elderly person”), or **עולל** (“child”). It is frequently paralleled with **בתולה**, and Isa 62:5 explicitly links those two groups as being of suitable for marriage.¹⁸⁴ Other characteristics of **בחור** are height and strength,¹⁸⁵ energy,¹⁸⁶ and the capability of serving a military function.¹⁸⁷ This military function, or at least capability, is also part of a number of judgement passages where **בחור** are slain by the sword, whereas **בנים** and **בנות** die by famine.¹⁸⁸ The age range of **בחור**, and hence the **ימים** of

¹⁸³ Longman III, *Ecclesiastes*, 259. So, too, NRSV, NJPSV, NAB, NJB, KJV, and NEB.

¹⁸⁴ Deut 32,25; Isa 23,4; 62,5; Jer 31,13; 51,22; Ezek 9,6; Amos 8,13; Zech 9,17; Ps 78,63; 148,12; Lam 1,15,18; 2,21; 2 Chr 36,17.

¹⁸⁵ Saul was a **בחור**, but stood **העם מכל גבה מעלה** (“from his shoulder and upward, he was taller than any of the people”—1 Sam 9:2). Prov 20:29 declares that **תפארת בחורים כחם** (“the glory of youths is their strength”).

¹⁸⁶ So Isa 40:30 in parallel with **נערים**.

¹⁸⁷ So in Jer 51:3 **בחור** stands in parallel with **צבא** as though **בחור** comprised part of the **צבא**. Also, in 49:26 the lexeme stands parallel with the expression **אנשי המלחמה** (“warriors”).

¹⁸⁸ See 2 Kgs 8:12; Jer 11:22, 18:21; and Ezek 30:17. There are passages, however, that also indicate that **בתולה** die by the sword, but in all cases this is in parallel arrangement with **בחור** falling by the sword. It must be acknowledged, then, that the indications of **בחור** falling by the sword are due both to their probable participation in military activities and the age bracket to which they belong.

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בַּחֹרֶר, would appear to be that period beyond childhood but before one begins a family of one's own. In age terms, it likely represents late teens or early twenties.¹⁸⁹

This reckoning demonstrates how the *ימי בחורות* is a fitting balance for the age of infirmity described in chapters 11 and 12. In terms of duration, the time of youth would be approximately what one would expect as the duration of time of infirmity due to the advance of age. Qoheleth does not directly address, however, his view of the time that lies between these two poles.

With ראשונים (7:10)

While much is made of the potential use of quotations in Qoheleth's argument, one encounters an obvious quotation in 7:10 followed by Qoheleth's judgement upon the statement. The introduction, *אל-תאמר*, clearly identifies a quotation initially rendered by someone other than Qoheleth.¹⁹⁰ The identity of the character was not a concern.¹⁹¹

The duration of the *ימי הראשונים* is of central concern to the interpretation of the verse. Do the *ימי הראשונים* represent times of the distant past accessible through story and lore, or do these "days" rather represent a span of time confined to one speaker's own lifetime?

The only other use of *ראשון* occurs in 1:11. There the sense is clearly of former generations far removed from the events of the narrator's present. But since this is a component of the narrator's section rather than Qoheleth's, it warrants further investigation outside Ecclesiastes. A similar expression occurs in four other places in the Hebrew Bible. These are summarized in Table 1.

As these cases indicate, the span envisioned by *ימי ראשונים* can be considerable (Deut 4:32), but in other cases is an indeterminate but not considerable period of time. There is no reason not to view the expression in the same manner of 1:11, where it lay outside the bounds of an individual's lifespan, though we must admit some ambiguity.

¹⁸⁹ See the discussion in Brin, *Concept of Time*, 61-64 about the potential importance of being twenty years of age as a gauge of moral and ethical responsibility.

¹⁹⁰ See Fox, "Quotations in Biblical Literature" for characteristics of identifying quotations.

¹⁹¹ As in Proverbs where numerous caricatures are offered of different groups with speech placed in the mouths of those representatives. So with the *אשה זרה* in 7:5-20, the *קונה* in 20:14, or the *עצל* in 22:13 and 26:13.

Table 1 Occurrences of ימים ראשונים Outside of Ecclesiastes

Reference	Expression (BHS)	Translation	Time (distant past or lifetime)
Num 6:12	והזיר ליהוה את־ימי נזרו והביא כבש בן־שנתו לאשם וְהַיָּמִים הָרִאשֹׁנִים יָפְלוּ כִּי טָמֵא נִזְרוּ:	and he will live as a Nazarite for the LORD the days of his consecration, and he will bring a lamb one year old for a guilt offering, and the <u>former days</u> will remain unfulfilled for his consecration was defiled.	Lifetime ¹⁹²
Deut 4:32	כִּי שֶׁאֶל־נֹא לַיָּמִים רִאשֹׁנִים אֲשֶׁר־הָיוּ לִפְנֵיךָ לִמְנֶה־הַיּוֹם אֲשֶׁר בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אָדָם עַל־הָאָרֶץ	For ask about <u>former days</u> , which were before you from the day that God created human beings upon the earth.	Distant Past
Deut 10:10	וְאֲנִי עֲמַדְתִּי בַהָר בַּיָּמִים הָרִאשֹׁנִים אַרְבָּעִים יוֹם וְאַרְבָּעִים לַיְלָה	I myself stood on the mountain like the <u>former days</u> , forty days and forty nights.	Lifetime
Zech 8:11	וְעַתָּה לֹא בַיָּמִים הָרִאשֹׁנִים אֲנִי לְשֹׁאֲרֵית הָעָם הַזֶּה	And now not like <u>the former days</u> am I for the remnant of this people	Lifetime ¹⁹³

¹⁹² Referring to the length of time of the temporary nazarite vow, which is voided if the vow giver inadvertently comes in contact with a corpse. See Jacob Milgrom, *Numbers*, ed. Nahum M. Sarna, JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia, PA: The Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 47.

¹⁹³ Carol L. Meyers and Eric M. Meyers, *Haggai, Zechariah 1-8*, ed. David Noel Freedman, AB 25b (London: Doubleday, 1987), 422 indicates that the temporal divide between the “former days” and the present for the hearers of the oracle is the start of the construction of the Temple, dated to December 18, 520. Thus, the look back need not be very long, but represents a different manner of dealing with the Israelites and thus a different time period.

With יָמִים (2:3; 5:17, 19; 6:12; 8:15; 9:9a)

The use of יָמִים with יָמִים, which is always in the plural, is a relatively straightforward expression. In all but one case, it is not central to the understanding of the passages in question. Thus, we will examine these references briefly according to some of the standard expressions in which these occur.

In three cases (2:3; 5:17; 6:12), מִסְפָּר יָמֵי חַיִּים occurs in construct with מִסְפָּר, which may have a role in tempering the expression, though this is uncertain.¹⁹⁴ The expression “days of life,” whether modified by “few” or “all,” refers to the lifespan of an individual between any point of age and the time of death.

The expression כָּל־יְמֵי חַיֵּי הַבָּלָד of 9:9 acts similarly. In fact, the syntax of the whole expression is remarkably similar to 5:17 so that the relative clause, אֲשֶׁר־אֶחָבֵת, acts as a similar “which” phrase to the שִׁיעַמַל תַּחַת־הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ of 5:17. The time reference, again, is the course of one’s adult.

Another occurrence of יָמֵי חַיִּים occurs in the summary to Qoheleth’s discourse on the righteous and the wicked (8:10-15). Following a description of multiple sources of הַבָּל, including the human confusion of how the righteous and wicked are to be treated (8:10) and the equally apparent divine confusion (8:11-14), Qoheleth returns to the familiar theme of praising enjoyment. This commendation of שִׂמְחָה includes three components of eating (לֶאֱכֹל), drinking (לִשְׁתּוֹת) and enjoying (לִשְׂמֹחַ). It is שִׂמְחָה that will accompany (לוֹ) a human being “through the days of life” (יָמֵי חַיָּיו). In a similar manner to 5:17, Qoheleth describes the יָמֵי חַיָּיו as being given by God (נָתַן־לּוֹ אֱלֹהִים תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ). The time frame represented by יָמֵי חַיָּיו, again, is that of an undefined period beginning at some age of responsibility when עָמַל begins and terminating at death.¹⁹⁵

One further occurrence of יָמֵי חַיִּים appears in 5:19. We examine this last, as it not only reveals a different nuance to יָמֵי חַיִּים, but as a crucial verse in the consideration of Ecclesiastes presentation of time. This verse forms a conclusion to

¹⁹⁴ See the discussion in Schoors, *Preacher, Part II*, 476. HALOT, s.v. מִסְפָּר, 2b suggests that it may be used in order to limit a number and so indicating that it is few enough to count. HALOT suggests (3d) that 2:3 carries the sense of “their total (short) time of life, meaning as long as they live.”

¹⁹⁵ Of course, an argument could be made in light of the exhortations of 11:7-12:8 that the time frame ends at that point where שִׂמְחָה is no longer possible.

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a unit before Qoheleth begins his further exploration of the human predicament,¹⁹⁶ and it is part of the oft repeated theme of enjoyment. In the unit of 5:9-16, Qoheleth expounds that what is “good” is to eat, drink and to find enjoyment one’s labours. Furthermore, he describes both the **מספר ימי־חיי** (v. 17) and **נכסים/עשר** (v. 18) are gifts of God when one is permitted to enjoy them. The benefit of this enjoyment for Qoheleth is not found in the items themselves, but in the fact that this allows an individual to **לא הרבה יזכר את־ימי חיי** (“he will not often call to mind the days of his life”).

We encounter a different nuance to the expression **ימי חיי**. Unlike other expressions that look at the whole of one’s life, the expression here is targeted at that time of life that is past tied as it is to **זכר**. This nuance is important since it provides a further indication that Qoheleth deprecates reflection upon the past as having little value.¹⁹⁷ The “days of one’s life” is any backward glance upon prior experience whether that time is measured in days, years or decades.

Overall, the use of **ימי חיי** in Ecclesiastes refers to the lifespan of an individual, particularly concerned with the years of productivity or work. Childhood does not appear to be a concern of Qoheleth as he focuses upon productivity and usefulness with one’s resources.

With **מכאבים** (2:23)

Towards the end of Qoheleth’s self-reflective work in 1:12-2:23, Qoheleth extrapolates to consider the everyman (“mortals”) in vv. 21-23. He notes that **כל־ימיו מכאבים** (“all his days are pain”).¹⁹⁸ The period covered by one’s “days” is here almost equal to one’s lifetime, but not precisely since the starting point is not birth. The context of the expression refers to **רעיון לבו** and **עמל**, which are not the

¹⁹⁶ See Schwienhorst-Schönberger, *Kohelet*, 336-38 and Norbert Lohfink, “Qoheleth 5:17-19: Revelation by joy,” *CBQ* 52 (1990): 625 who treat 5:17-19 as a unit unto itself.

¹⁹⁷ See Qoheleth’s similar statement in 2:9-11. In 2:8-9, Qoheleth describes his own pleasure in all his wealth. In v. 11, however, Qoheleth describes how he turned (**פניתי אני**) toward all his works and declared **הנה הכל הבל**. The reflection on what was done brought the declaration of **הבל**. Similarly, one can point to the statement of 7:10 about reflecting on the past and comparing it to the present as being “unwise” as another indication of this same wariness to dwell on the past.

¹⁹⁸ The gender-neutral program of the NRSV creates an interesting interpretive question here. NRSV translates as “For all their days are full of pain.” It is unclear whether the use of the plural, “their,” is merely part of the gender-neutral program or whether the translators hold that “humanity” (**אדם**) in general is in view.

concern of the very young. The days of pain, therefore, coincide with the time of significant responsibility in one's life.

With הבל (7:15; 9:9b)

The use of הבל has garnered more attention in Qoheleth than any other single word, and rightly so. Many have made the argument that an understanding of the sense of this word is a key, if not the key, to an understanding of the whole work. Our search here, then, is much less ambitious given that our concern is the relation of this term, הבל, to the plural construct form of יום.

We have already addressed some of the issues in the section of 7:12-19, including the use of אֶת־הַכֹּל (v. 15) as “everything” or “all things” rather than “both.” Qoheleth declares that he has seen everything בִּימֵי הַבֶּל. Here we encounter a construct relationship whereby הבל becomes a characteristic of the יָמִים, and thus may be rendered as “my הבל days.” There are three possibilities for this expression. First, הבל may indicate the lack of usefulness—vain days. In this, Qoheleth could be re-expressing his distress in 2:11 that all his toil was הַבֶּל וְרַעוּת רוּחַ. The only real contribution that Qoheleth is able to make is then observing (רָאָה) rather than doing (עָשָׂה). Second, הבל may be an expression of brevity relying on הבל's connection with smoke and vapour as something that is transitory.¹⁹⁹ Qoheleth may express that his own life is a fleeting blip in the span of human existence. The third possibility is using the expression of Fox and others who see הבל as an expression of absurdity. Thus בִּימֵי הַבֶּל represents something tragic and incomprehensible.²⁰⁰

The context of the work as a whole and the immediate context of the passage, however, leads me toward בִּימֵי הַבֶּל in the third sense above—“my absurd days.” The overall persona of Qoheleth is one who has lived long and seen it all. While Qoheleth may lament the effect of death that wipes away accomplishment, the fact

¹⁹⁹ Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 139 “In my fleeting days.” So, too, NJPSV “in my own brief span of life.”

²⁰⁰ Fox, “Meaning of *hebel* for Qoheleth,” 410. Fox also inquires after whether הבל here is ephemeral or absurd. Fox maintains that it is absurdity rather than brevity that is most congruent with Qoheleth's presentation. We note the contention of Doug Ingram, *Ambiguity in Ecclesiastes*, Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 431 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2006), 129, however, that the sense of הבל is ambiguous and this ambiguity may be deliberate to force the reader to choose or not choose a definition. The number of proposals for the use of הבל certainly supports its ambiguity, at least for the modern reader.

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that people do die is not the central issue. Qoheleth speaks as the sage who has seen it all rather than the one who has lived too short a time. Seeing it all has not provided Qoheleth the key to all existence, and in that sense Qoheleth's search has been in vain in the sense of absurd.²⁰¹

The context of 7:15 also does not emphasize brevity but the difficulties of life. As we have seen in the exploration of 7:14 above, good times and bad times intertwine to foil any attempt on the part of humans to see a pattern to abide by. Verse 15b follows with the notion of the mismatched treatment of the righteous and wickedness. Neither of these are caused by brevity of life, but both feed the idea that life, even the life of the sage Qoheleth, is absurd. The advice to embrace both wickedness and righteousness also fits the notion of pointlessness rather than brevity. So as a whole, "in the days of my vanity" is more appropriate to the message of Ecclesiastes as a whole than "in my own brief span of time."

The use of "days" is connected with the lifespan of Qoheleth as a collective: "my vain life," though we would argue that the days in mind are those associated with adult life when productivity is expected. Qoheleth has failed to produce anything of lasting value, which contributes to this sense of vanity.

It is in a similar vein that we view 9:9. We have already explored the use of *ימי הבל* above. The reading of v. 9:9b is very difficult. It would appear to begin with an independent clause beginning with a modified form of *כל ימי הבל*, which this time reads *כל ימי הבל*. This is, in turn, modified by a *כי* clause consisting of two components: *הוא חלקך בחיים* and *ובעמלך אשר אתה עמל תחת השמש*. The greatest difficulty is indeed the *כל ימי הבל* since it apparently does not have a verb, nor is it easily taken to be a nominal sentence. Certainly the *הוא חלקך* is a verbless clause, but this only raises the question of its relationship to *כל ימי הבל* mediated by *כי*. It is unlikely that the *כי* here introduces a result clause ("because, for") given that the expression *כל ימי הבל* does not seem to be offering any substantial information that requires clarification.

²⁰¹ Longman III, *Ecclesiastes*, 194 prefers meaningless, but Qoheleth's life has meaning according to the frame narrator (12:9-10). Rather, this meaning is in conflict with the desire of humanity for longevity and greatness, which Qoheleth tried to comprehend. It is the reconciliation of life as observed and the desire of the human enterprise that is absurd.

Commentators handle the text in two different ways. Either the phrase is to be deleted, supported by the majority of Greek witnesses,²⁰² or one may see it as a free floating expression of emphasis at the end of clause highlighting the “vanity” of life.²⁰³ With respect to our understanding of חל, the heart of the question is to inquire whether it is an expression of temporality, or of futility? Considering this question requires an exploration of the role of חל in the next portion of the verse.

A survey of the eight uses of חלק suggests that it encompasses both the tangible as well as the intangible and Qoheleth construes it as positive. For example, חלק follows a similar pattern in 2:10, 3:22 and 5:17. In the first, the זֶה of וְזֶה־הָיָה חֶלְקִי (“and this was my portion”) has a very specific referent: כִּי־לִבִּי שִׂמְחָה מְכַל־עֲמָלִי (“for my heart rejoiced in all my toil”). Here, חלק refers to the verbal idea of enjoying one’s toil. Similarly in 3:22, Qoheleth declares אֵין טוֹב מֵאֲשֶׁר יִשְׂמַח הָאָדָם בְּמַעֲשָׁיו (“there is nothing better than that the man should rejoice in his work”), and then goes on to declare “for that is his portion [חלק].” One’s חלק is the act of enjoying. In 5:17 there is no reference to שִׂמְחָה, but this is substituted with יִפֶּה לֵאכּוֹל־וּלְשִׂתּוֹת וּלְרְאוֹת טוֹבָה בְּכָל־עֲמָלּוֹ (“it is fitting to eat and to drink and see goodness in all his toil”). In these three instances, חלק refers to a specific verbal idea of enjoyment. While these indicate that Qoheleth desired something more, the חלק itself is a positive feature of his toil.

The use in 2:21 has a stronger connection to tangible goods, though not exclusively. Qoheleth refers to a hypothetical individual “whose toil was with wisdom and knowledge and skill,” but must leave his portion to another who did not toil for it. Here חֵלֶק could be synonymous with wealth, but the emphasis on wisdom, knowledge and skill that contribute to חֵלֶק makes this a less satisfying solution. Is Qoheleth’s complaint here only about wealth passed on, or, speaking as King Qoheleth, is it the power, influence, and wealth—the intangibles as well as the tangibles—that is in view here?

The connection of חלֵק with “love” (אהבתם), “hate” (שנאתם), and “jealousy” (קנאתם) in 9:6 leads to the conclusion that חלֵק is again not strictly

²⁰² So Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 302. Also NRSV, NAB. Goldman (BHQ, 104*) notes the redundancy but suggests it could have been removed from the *Vorlage* of LXX by parablepsis.

²⁰³ So, for example, Bartholomew, *Ecclesiastes*, 298 and Fox, *Time to Tear Down*, 295. Also KJV, NJPSV and NJB.

one's possessions. In 11:2, however, the dividing of one's חלק should be given "to seven or to eight," and so may well refer to tangible goods. Overall, the use of חלק indicates that it can encompass, but need not be limited to, tangible goods.²⁰⁴

Returning to our discussion in 9:9, one's portion (חלק) being ראה חיים עם-אשה אשר-אהבת fits with the potential of enjoyment similar to enjoying one's wealth. In total, חלק is something positive for Qoheleth. Thus, it would seem strange to twice refer to one's "meaningless" life only to then refer to being with the woman one loves (a positive so it would seem) as one's portion. Brevity is possible, but better is the notion of absurd.²⁰⁵ It is absurd that one can enjoy, but this enjoyment does not provide lasting satisfaction.

In this case, the use of כל ימי הבלך is a reiteration of the time frame under consideration by the use of כל-ימי חיי הבלך, which are those mature years where the love of a partner can be an important component of life.

With שנה (6:3)

The section beginning at 6:1 deals with the great evil Qoheleth observed that lay upon mortals whose description comes in 6:2. This situation Qoheleth pronounces to be חלי רע and הבל. Then, in v. 3, Qoheleth picks up a thread from his description of a certain man (איש אשר) to describe the limits to which this description of חלי רע and הבל apply.

The expression in question is ורב שיהיו ימי-שניו, which is a part of four clauses of almost equal length. The expression ימי-שני occurs also in Genesis, 2 Samuel and Psalms,²⁰⁶ and in each case refers to the total of the length of one's life. There is no reason to posit a different meaning here especially given that the expression in 6:3 occurs in conjunction with ויחיה רבות ("and will live many years").

²⁰⁴ Similarly Schoors, *Preacher, Part II*, 200. TDOT, s.v. חלק suggests "the space allotted to human life" coming from Galling, "Der Prediger," in *Die Fünf Megilloth*, ed. Otto Eissfeldt, Handbuch zum Alten Testament, 18 (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1969), 89. This Schoors, *Preacher, Part I*, 199 critiques, and rightly so, as an "incomplete idea."

²⁰⁵ We would distinguish between "meaninglessness" and "purposelessness." Meaninglessness conveys a lack of value so much so that its very existence is of little consequence. Purposelessness, on the other hand, conveys a lack of connection to some greater purpose, but does not necessarily require that something is of little consequence, but only that its usefulness is in doubt.

²⁰⁶ Gen 25:7; 47:8,9; 2 Sam 19:35; Ps 90:10.

Summary: The Sense of יום

It is this term in the plural, rather than עת, that is used as the generic word for *time* as English speakers would employ it.²⁰⁷ Thus, the combination of יומים with יח (e.g., 2:3; 5:17, 19; 6:12; 8:15; 9:9), expresses “lifetime.” It occurs in various other relationships with the general sense of time. In 2:16 it occurs in apposition to the *Qal* participle—הַיָּמִים הַבָּאִים—with the sense of “the time ahead.” In 2:23, the verbless clause כִּי כָל יְמֵי מַכָּאבִים—literally “for all his days are pain”—points toward a continuous time of pain rather than 24 hour segments. Similarly in 5:16, כִּי כָל יְמֵי בַחֲשָׁךְ is a (life)time spent experiencing incertitude. There is little restricting the duration of יום except its immediate context of use. It can be used in 7:15, 11:9 and 12:1 to refer to the time of youthfulness, lasting perhaps a few years, or more broadly of long stretches of time—the former times of 7:10—which spans years, decades or centuries.

The use of the singular of יום is more varied but less broadly construed. Overall, the word יום shows a remarkable amount of flexibility in its singular and plural forms, and is Qoheleth’s preferred generic word for time.

Conclusions

We have demonstrated that עת and יום occur in consistent patterns within Ecclesiastes. The work utilizes עת as a short duration word that focuses on events with a limited nature. In fact, עת seems to be a foundational concept within human existence as they shift from activity to activity, moment to moment. Qoheleth has suggested that limitation is a function of God’s judgement within the world (3:17).

On the other hand, we have demonstrated that יום is much more flexible occurring in various states and combinations. It is most often modified by another concept, especially in the construct plural (days of life, days of youth, evil days, days of pain, days of darkness). In contrast to עת, which considers incidents as isolated from other events, יום points the reader toward stretches of time in which other events can take place. Qoheleth views life “under the sun” not only in terms of

²⁰⁷ Though Barr, *Biblical Words for Time*, 102 hesitates to use it as an example in the context of his argument, he does mention that יום, especially in the plural, can represent “time in general.” He does so in dialogue with Marsh who suggests that Hebrew had no word for time in general, but offers up Num 9:22 as an example. This sense of יום in the plural is similarly noted by Orelli, *Synonyma der Zeit und Ewigkeit*, 52n.

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moments, but also in terms of stretches of life, which can be categorized and generalized. Most of the characterizations have a negative connotation, such as “days of darkness,” “days of pain.” Qoheleth’s one descriptor that refers to a stage in development is the expression “days of your youth” but most often the descriptions are not tied to life stages. Rather, they are more general descriptors of life to its limit that is variously characterized as “vain,” “in darkness” or “pain.”

Ecclesiastes contains, then, the dual elements of “moments” characterized by activity and “stretches” of life, often characterized negatively. We will continue to be mindful of the patterns developing from the exploration of other words for time in the following chapter.

Chapter Three: Additional Words for Time

Introduction

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, the lexemes עת and יום are central to the exploration of time in Ecclesiastes due to their ubiquity and sheer number of uses. These lexemes demonstrate that the temporal discussion in Ecclesiastes is nuanced to focus not only on moments and incidences but also on spans of time covering years and generations.

This chapter will continue the investigation of time words looking at less frequent lexemes and expressions. These include דור, שנה, עולם, and זכרון/זכר, none of which occur more than ten times though between them occur in eight of twelve chapters.¹ We begin with דור since our investigation of עולם in 1:4 ties in with its use.

דור (1:4)

The two occurrences of the lexeme דור are in 1:4. This דור is described as being in motion by two Qal participles, בל and הולך. In contrast to this motion, the earth stands לעולם. The contrast by itself, however, provides little clue to the meaning of דור without understanding its role in the overall presentation of 1:4-11. This presentation is subject to debate, however, and our position in this debate influences the understanding of דור.

Both Fox and Ogden have argued, in their own way, that the contrast in this verse is not between the permanence of the earth and the transience of human beings, though this is the majority position.² At the heart of the issue is the point of comparison. On the one hand, if the verbs are the locus of comparison we have a

¹ These lexemes are absent from chapters 4, 7, 8, and 10. This is less significant when one considers that these chapters contain mostly aphoristic sayings.

² Graham S. Ogden, "The Interpretation of דור in Ecclesiastes 1.4," *JSOT* 34 (1986): 91-92 and Fox, *Time to Tear Down*, 166 as well as Michael V. Fox, "Qohelet 1.4," *JSOT* 40 (1988): 109. The main difference in the two approaches is that Fox understands ארץ as a reference to humanity, which does not change through cycles of birth and death, rather than the "earth" as a heavenly body. For Fox, this means that there is no contrast between ארץ and דור but together shows that all of existence, humanity included, moves in endless stagnation. Ogden, on the other hand, suggests that ארץ refers to the physical world and דור to cyclical movements in general. He insists that a contrast is required (contra Fox; see Graham S. Ogden, *Qoheleth*, 2nd ed, Readings (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2007), 35), but not between humanity and the earth, but the earth and all other phenomena.

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contrast between what is in motion with what is permanent (so Ogden). The earth remains constant (עמדת) while everything else travels on circuits. The sense of דור in this case is anything that travels on a circuit. That other natural phenomena travel in circuits is then positively compared to human phenomena beginning in v. 8 and following.

On the other hand, if the point of comparison stands between communities of human beings (דור) that come and go with natural phenomena that endure, then v. 4 sets up the initial contrast while vv. 5-7 further demonstrate nature's permanence. Here we take for the starting point that frequently in Biblical Hebrew, דור refers to generations of human beings.³ Next, we notice the use of שמש, ארץ, רוח, and נחלים in vv. 5-7, which are all natural bodies whose existence and function are well attested. Since דור is the unique element surrounded by natural images, we suggest that the contrast arises between the human element, represented by דור, and the natural phenomena. Even in v. 8, the natural processes are not strictly confined to human beings but are also features of the animal order. Even through v. 10, the concept is that of circuits which are constantly moving. But in v. 11, which stands as a bookend to v. 4, directionality arises once again as people pass out of memory never to return, just as the דור comes and goes.

The verbs הלך and בוא occur paired in three other locations in Ecclesiastes. Their use is instructive. In 5:14, 15 these verbs are used to point to the movement of a single human being who continues to live with the material resources (nothing) with which he entered life. These verbs represent a progression rather than circuits. Similarly, the stillbirth of 6:4 does not continue on a cycle but progresses toward, in this case, nothingness. Unlike the sun, wind and rivers, going and coming is not a circuit but a journey. The contrast, then, is not strictly in the verbs but the permanence of nature's structures compared with the movement of human beings (communities) in the march of time as demonstrated in both v. 4 and v. 11.

We see no reason to posit another sense for דור other than "generation" as the successive birth of children to adults, and for both הלך and בוא to signify

³ TDOT, s.v. דור. A generation is counted from the birth of one son to that of a grandson. There is no need for a father to die in order for there to be a succeeding generation. There is also no consistent numeric value assigned to a דור in the Hebrew Bible.

progressive movement. These generations, the poem declares, are being replaced by further (new) generations.

עולם

It is suggested that the use of עולם in Ecclesiastes is unique in the Hebrew Bible.⁴ A long duration of time is central to its sense though this time can stretch both forwards and backwards.⁵ Our focus is to extract the nuanced use of this term throughout its seven occurrences in Ecclesiastes.

Ecc 1:4

As we have just observed above looking at the lexeme דור, the movement of one generation after another is contrasted to the earth, which remains לעולם. It is implied in the scene that there will not arise a generation that cannot rely on the endurance of the earth. In this verse, עולם represents something permanent and free from the movement of renewal that affects human communities. Krüger's translation of "the earth remains constant into distant time" is fitting here.⁶ The comment of the frame narrator does not have the earth itself in view, but functions to create a foil for the human condition.⁷

Ecc 1:10

As we have suggested above, 1:5-10 conclude some things, even cyclical things, are permanent, and this is contrasted to human generations that are linear in the sense that they move onto the stage of existence then off. This leads to the conclusion that there is nothing truly new in the cycles of any natural phenomena: "That which is, is that which will be; what is done will be done again" (v. 9).⁸ This opinion stated in v. 9 is supplemented in v. 10 with the description of a theoretical

⁴ TDOT, s.v. עולם, IV, 10. Ernst Jenni, "Das Wort 'ōlām im Alten Testament," *ZAW* 64/65 (1952/53), 22 also suggests as much.

⁵ HALOT, s.v. עולם, 2 and 3.

⁶ Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 47.

⁷ As Barton, *Ecclesiastes*, 73 notes referencing Christian D. Ginsberg, *Cohleth, commonly called the book of Ecclesiastes: translated from the original Hebrew, with a commentary, historical and critical* (London: Longman, Green, Longman & Roberts, 1861), 526-28. Using a word such as "eternal" can perpetuate the idea that something has always been as well as always will be. That is not the thought of the frame-narrator here.

⁸ Isaksson, *Studies in Qohelet*, 75.

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objection. Someone *may say* that something new has been discovered. This is subsequently dismissed in v. 10.

We must inquire after the subject of the narrator's dismissal. Is the dismissal at the act of discovery, or at the notion of progress itself? If one *discovers* something in the natural world, it is not really new, since it has always been there but has remained obscured from human view. On the other hand, the dismissal may be aimed at a rejection of anything truly new that can be termed progress. Even when someone claims that they have done something new, the narrator may claim derisively, "How do you know?" Given that the natural world is in view through vv. 4-7, and that v. 11 deals with memory, it is possible that both viewpoints are really at issue, and v. 10 provides the bridge between them.

The phenomenon in question is described as already having existed לעלמים. The use of the plural here is unique in Ecclesiastes, and in fact occurs only three other times in LBH, and twelve times in the Hebrew Bible as a whole compared with over 400 uses of the singular.⁹

Is there any significance to the use of the plural עולמים here instead of the singular עולם?¹⁰ If one looks at the occurrences outside of Ecclesiastes, it is clear that the use of עולמים does not carry any special significance that is not also carried by עולם. In both 1 Kgs 8:13 and 2 Chr 6:2, Solomon declares that he has built a house as "a place for your dwelling forever" (מכון לשבתך עולמים).¹¹ But similar expressions, also using the verb שָׁב, occur elsewhere with the singular and having a similar sense. For example, Jer 17:25 recounts the promise from Yahweh that obedience will lead to protection for Jerusalem and "this city shall be inhabited

⁹ One will also notice that in the Mishnah, there are only two occurrences of עולמים and 214 occurrences of the singular עולם. In *m. Tamid* 7:4, the expression is לְחַיֵּי הָעוֹלָמִים ("to everlasting life"), while in *m. Uqtzin* 3:12 שלש מאות ועשרה עולמות ("three hundred and ten worlds") represents an entirely different nuance of עולם. In the non-biblical Qumran fragments, there are 596 total occurrences of עולם, with 231 of those occurrences being the plural עולמים (compiled with the assistance of Accordance software, Qumran module v. 2.9).

¹⁰ GKC §124a,b suggests that the plural of עולם acts as a "plural of extension" indicating a "lengthened period of time." Jenni, "Das Wort 'ōlām," 24 considers that this expression may be under the influence of the Greek sense of αἰών, though he also considers the possibility that the plural represents an intensive (244).

¹¹ Whitley, *Koheleth*, 11 suggests that while some of the plural forms have the force of the singular, 1 Kgs 8:13 is an example of adverbial force. In the case of 1:10, however, he suggests it is emphatic for a lengthy singular period: "already it was in *the age* which was before us."

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forever” (יִשְׁבֶּה הָעִיר־הַזֹּאת לְעוֹלָם). Similarly in Ps 9:8 the psalmist declares “and the LORD sits enthroned forever” (וַיֵּהוּהָ לְעוֹלָם יָשֵׁב).¹²

We find עוֹלָמִים used twice in Ps 77. In v. 6 it stands in parallel with קֶדֶם in the expression יָמִים מִקֶּדֶם שְׁנוֹת עוֹלָמִים (“the days from time immortal... years of long ago”).¹³ But the singular עוֹלָם stands in parallel with קֶדֶם as well (Deut 33:15, 27; Mic 5:1). Similarly in v. 8 the psalmist asks “Will the Lord reject (יִזְנֹחַ) forever (עוֹלָמִים)” while in Lam 3:31 “For the Lord will not reject (יִזְנֹחַ) forever (עוֹלָם).”

There appears little reason to give the עוֹלָמִים of Eccl 1:11 any significance that would not be carried simply by עוֹלָם. The text contains a modifying relative clause, אֲשֶׁר הָיָה מִלִּפְנֵינוּ, in the singular modifying עוֹלָמִים. This suggests עוֹלָמִים functions as collective singular further confirming that we cannot place any special significance upon this use of the plural.

In 1:10, then, the view of עוֹלָמִים is either that of geological time, if the critique is about natural discovery, or vast stretches of human existence. Given its placement in this particular section with its natural and human imagery, it is perhaps able to do both. In either case, it signifies a considerable and conceptually difficult length of time looking toward the past.

Eccl 2:16

In the midst of Qoheleth’s self-revelation, 2:12-16 contemplates the life of wisdom. On the surface, Qoheleth found that wisdom is superior to folly. But this is mitigated by the fact that even Qoheleth knows that there is one fate (מִקְרָה) that awaits everyone, whether they be wise or foolish (v. 14).

The fate about which Qoheleth laments is not simply death.¹⁴ To decry the fact that everyone dies is a meaningless gesture far beneath one who claims

¹² These examples could be multiplied including, but not limited to, Ezek 37:25, Joel 4:20, Ps 29:10, 102:13, 125:1, and Lam 5:19.

¹³ The plural עוֹלָמִים also stands parallel with קֶדֶם in Isa 51:9 עוֹלָמִים (“as days of time immortal, the generations of long ago”).

¹⁴ Contra Shannon Burkes, *Death in Qoheleth and Egyptian Biographies of the Late Period*, SBLDS 170 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999), 60 and 63 who suggests that it is death itself that is the source of Qoheleth’s lament rather than the effects of death. Burkes’s reflection on the social factors pertaining to the Israelite view of death are quite relevant to Ecclesiastes, however. She references corporate personality (pp. 28-32) as one potential societal factor in coping with the reality of death. Qoheleth, however, does not embrace any notion that corporate personality exists since society is not able to

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unsurpassed wisdom (1:16). Qoheleth's concern is not with the fact of his death, but with the significance of his life. In the living years, one has the ability to control one's legacy, at least to a certain extent. Death is not absurd because one ceases to live, but is tragic because one ceases to be in control of what one has accomplished. This is left to others over whom there is no control (2:18-19). This loss of control ultimately leads to the loss of significance since there is no memory (זכרון) of either the wise or the fool לעולם. The עולם in this case refers strictly to the future, and has the sense of "enduring"—that is, stretching into the future indefinitely.¹⁵ The second portion of the verse, which we have examined previously, refers to the "coming days." These "coming days" do not represent a long duration of time, but represent the progressive movement of time away from an origin (the time of death). This progressive movement wears away the memory of all things. The final phrase of v. 16 (איך ימות החכם עם-הבסיל) once again returns to the prospect that death makes no distinction between the wise and foolish. But again, the real lament of Qoheleth is not directed at death itself, which is inescapable, but at the loss of significance of one's life in the face of death.¹⁶

The use of עולם in this case is, again, a far reaching segment of time that begins in the near future but continues on indefinitely into an uncertain future. The emphasis on forgetfulness is not just a lament that eventually it will be forgotten ("in" עולם), but that it fades in the movement "toward" עולם as representative of an ever moving horizon of time.

Ecc 3:11

The use of עולם in 3:11 is highly contested. The verse describes עולם as something placed within the heart of human beings.¹⁷ The גם of the expression

keep alive the accomplishments of its forbearers. This stark isolation is a contributing factor in the lament against death.

¹⁵ NJPSV has "forever" through it is unclear whether Qoheleth wants people to be remembered forever or simply for longer than the few days of their life. Fox, *Ecclesiastes*, 16 prefers "never remembered" to the NJPSV "not remembered forever."

¹⁶ Longman III, *Ecclesiastes*, 99 comes close when he writes, "it is not only death that frustrates Qoheleth...but even his memory will be eradicated from the earth." We would suggest that more emphasis should be placed upon the loss of remembrance as a larger point of contention for Qoheleth rather than simply the end of life.

¹⁷ Though Tilmann Zimmer, *Zwischen Tod und Lebensglück: Eine Untersuchung zur Anthropologie Kokolets*, BZAW 286 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1999), 78-80 argues that the suffix of כלבם may refer to "all things" as a collective rather than "their hearts" referring back to בני האדם. While it is true that

אֶת־הַכֹּל, אֵלֶּם אֶת־הָעֵלָם נָתַן בְּלִבָּם makes a connection with the previous clause, עָשָׂה יָפֶה בְּעֵתוֹ, which indicates the appropriateness of activities in their limited duration. In the logic of Qoheleth, almost anything is appropriate in a limited manner, even wisdom and folly, righteousness and wickedness. The activities possible in this life, some of which are listed in 3:2-8, are appropriate in limited quantities at given moments. But along with limited actions, God has also given עוֹלָם. Given that there is some ambiguity to this point in Ecclesiastes over the benefits of what God gives,¹⁸ it is necessary to address two questions with regards to v. 11. First, what is Qoheleth's view of the gift of עוֹלָם as it connects with human knowledge, and, second, what is the sense of עוֹלָם in the way that it is employed?

The discussion over the effects of God's gift of עוֹלָם centers on the meaning of what many would call the conjunction מִבְּלִי אֲשֶׁר לֹא. Three proposals have been put forth concerning the understanding of this phrase. The first two understand the expression מִבְּלִי אֲשֶׁר לֹא to represent a conjunction, while the third proposal, not widely accepted, considers the phrase as a relative clause. We will consider the implications of each.

The first position is that מִבְּלִי אֲשֶׁר לֹא represents a final or consecutive meaning introducing purpose. An example is Haupt's rendition: All things He has made befitting their season; Yet he has veiled their mental vision, So that no man can ever find out What he has done from first to last."¹⁹ Often one finds that those advocating for מִבְּלִי אֲשֶׁר לֹא as a purpose clause also advocate a meaning for אֶת־הָעֵלָם other than "eternity,"²⁰ though this rendering is also preserved in the KJV and is reflected in the LXX's ὅπως μὴ εὕρη ὁ ἄνθρωπος τὸ ποίημα. In this case, God has actively sought to obfuscate the seeking action of humanity by the placement of אֶת־הָעֵלָם.

לֵב can indicate the "midst" of some object, such as the sea or the heaven, Zimmer does not account for the other 40 uses of לֵב in Ecclesiastes that links לֵב to humans and not to things.

¹⁸ In Ecclesiastes, what is given by God can be both bad and good. So in 1:13, God gives עֲנִיָּה (negative). In 2:26, God gives to the one who pleases him beneficial attributes (positive), but at the same time is described as giving unfulfilling work to "sinners" (negative). Again in 3:10, God gives עֲנִיָּה, this time not modified. In 5:17, God gives the מִי־חַיִּים that one is able to enjoy (also 8:15, 9:9) and in 5:18 gives עֲשֶׂה וְנִכְסִים וְהַשְׁלִימוֹ (both positive—cf. 6:2 where God gives but does not allow enjoyment). For the most part, what God gives is to be enjoyed.

¹⁹ Haupt, *Ecclesiastes*, 24;

²⁰ So also Whitley, *Koheleth*, 31-33; Mitchell J. Dahood, "Canaanite-Phoenician Influence in Qoheleth," *Bib* 33 (1952): 206.

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The second position is to render מְבַלִּי אֲשֶׁר לֹא with an exceptive or restrictive force (i.e., “yet,” “but,” “although,” “without”), and is followed by a host of commentators.²¹ The difficulty of this position is that the works of God from beginning to end are unsearchable. This would appear to read against what Qoheleth goes on to intimate in v. 14: what God does stands לְעוֹלָם in order that “all should stand in awe before him.” It further goes against Qoheleth’s own experience, for as he himself says in 8:17 “then I saw all the work of God.” If the work of God is unknowable, as most commentators suggest, we have an apparent difficulty with Qoheleth’s own purported observations in 3:14 and 8:17.

A third possibility exists, though its existence is not generally widely acknowledged.²² It has been proposed to read אֲשֶׁר not as a conjunction, but to render it as a pronoun referring back to אֶת־הָעֵלֶם. This possibility has been mentioned by Goshen-Gottstein,²³ as well as in Joüon-Muraoka §148m relying on Goshen-Gottstein, and is acknowledged in a footnote in NASB. This usage has some strong evidence in its favor, not the least of which is allowing מְבַלִּי to function normally according to its other 25 uses in the Hebrew Bible (i.e., “without”), and it does not rely on לֹא to be pleonastic, which most commentators require it to be.²⁴ Grammatically speaking, it may be possible to read 3:11 in this manner: “He has made everything suitable for its time; moreover he has put a sense of the הָעֵלֶם into their minds without which mortals cannot find out what God has done from the

²¹ This is followed also by Ogden, *Qoheleth*, 60 (no translation given), Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 80 (“yet”) and Longman III, *Ecclesiastes*, 112 (“but still”). GKC §152y refers to Eccl 3:11 as one of the cases where two negatives do not neutralize each other, but combine to form a more emphatic negative. However, GKC appears to take מִן and בְּלִי as two negatives in themselves. So in this case, there are really three negatives. GKC does suggest a meaning of “except that (yet so that man cannot, &c.).” The parallels it provides, however, bear very little similarity to Eccl 3:11 since the relative pronoun אֲשֶׁר does not occur. Their example appears only to fit the usage of מְבַלִּי itself.

²² Even Schoors in his two volumes on the grammar and vocabulary of Ecclesiastes does not make reference to this possibility.

²³ Gottstein, M.H. “Afterthought and the Syntax of Relative Clauses in Biblical Hebrew.” *JBL* 68, (1949): 35-47.

²⁴ The use of the pleonastic לֹא may find some support in chapter 12, verses 1, 2 and 6 where most commentators accept the the expression עַד אֲשֶׁר לֹא seems to mean “before,” with very little in way of comment. Schoors, *Preacher, Part I*, 145 admits that this expression is not found elsewhere in the Bible but suggests that עַד שֶׁלֹא of Mishnaic Hebrew forms a suitable parallel. Interestingly, the two other uses of עַד אֲשֶׁר לֹא in 2 Sam 17:13 and 1 Kgs 17:17 require the לֹא to be active rather than pleonastic. Also, a search of 56 other verses in the Hebrew Bible in which a particle of any kind is followed by אֲשֶׁר לֹא reveals no other cases where the לֹא would be pleonastic.

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beginning to the end.”²⁵ This particular reading would represent a significant departure from the more traditional reading of the giving of **העלם** as a mixed blessing that only creates confusion among human beings. Currently, however, this suggestion has not been embraced by most readers of *Ecclesiastes*, and the majority favor rendering **מבלי אשר** as a conjunction, “yet” or “still.”

Following the common view,²⁶ the giving of **העלם** is a gift of God, but even this gift does not allow human beings to adequately comprehend the work of God. This gift is unable to align the human endeavour to the divine one. We may now return to consider what the gift of **העלם** may actually entail.

Crenshaw helpfully summarizes four positions with respect to how scholars treat **העלם** in the literature:²⁷ a) eternity; b) world; c) course of the world; d) knowledge or ignorance. To this we may add a fifth as some prefer to emend **העלם** to **העמל**, and this has most recently been promoted by Fox.²⁸ In Crenshaw’s 1974 article, he quite rightly pointed out that whatever the nuance of **העלם**, some sort of temporal meaning must be sought.²⁹ In this he is supported more recently by Schoors,³⁰ and given the predominance of temporal themes in this whole section, including a return to **עול** in v. 14, it befits taking this temporal route. But even if a conventional equivalent such as “eternity” is used, what does having it in the heart mean?

²⁵ Gottstein, “Afterthought,” 45 proposes, based on his study of relative clauses, that the current manner of understanding **מבלי אשר** based on the Mishnaic **ש מבלי** may not adequately reflect how the relative clause functions in Biblical Hebrew. He goes so far as to suggest that as long as the function of **מבלי אשר** is understood in light of the Mishnaic expression, the meaning is quite unclear.

²⁶ Though it is far from a vast majority. Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 80 thinks the rendering of a purpose clause, such as LXX’s ὅπως, is unlikely based both contextually where God’s work would not be so definitively scorned and grammatically, as **מבלי** does not lend itself to purpose clauses elsewhere. On the other hand, Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 163 accepts the LXX rendering of a purpose clause, though he unhelpfully calls this a result clause.

²⁷ Crenshaw, “The Eternal Gospel,” 40.

²⁸ Fox, *Time to Tear Down*, 211 where his evidence is largely based on a parallel with 8:17.

²⁹ He abandons this approach by 1987 as he suggests “darkness” in his *Ecclesiastes* commentary (97-98).

³⁰ So Schoors, “Theodicy,” 382 suggesting “in Qohelet **עול** always has a temporal meaning... This must be the case here too.” Isaksson, *Studies in Qohelet*, 180 advocates that any translation should encompass both the temporal and spatial meaning. Hence, he prefers “eternal work” (p. 183). He notes this is a unique sense of the word in Biblical Hebrew. The basis of his argument is rooted in **מבלי אשר** meaning “except” and that **העלם** having a sense parallel to **המעשה**, neither of which we accept as necessary, as we will show.

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While having עול as the object of the verb נתן is unique, perhaps a comparison to another abstract noun may shed light on the nuance. In three places in Exodus, the LORD gives חכמה into the heart of individuals.³¹ In these three cases, the giving of “wisdom” into one’s heart enabled the individuals to perform a skillful task. The giving into the heart was to enable some activity.

In this case, the giving of העל would be to enable reflection on long stretches of time. Barr suggests that העל takes on the nuance of “perpetuity” which he explains as “consciousness of memory, the awareness of past events.”³² This is a valuable suggestion, though it requires העל to look backwards rather than forwards. In the previous uses, the reference to עול is toward the future except in 1:10 where it is further clarified by “before us.” It seems more likely that it either refers to backward and forward, such as Krüger’s “distant time,”³³ or simply forward.

Seow’s contention that העל here references to “a sense of that which is timeless” as it does in v. 14 seems to impose a notion of “timelessness” that is neither necessary or desirable.³⁴ The work of God standing לעול in v. 14 is a similar idea to the permanence of the earth in 1:4, which stands לעול. In this case, however, Seow prefers to translate לעול as “as ever.”³⁵ Granted, Seow challenges the idea of 1:4 being about the earth’s permanence and rather sees it as the unchanging nature of the earth. In this case, לעול looks backwards rather than forwards. We contend that in 1:4, the contrast is between permanence of the earth and the transitoriness of human beings. Similarly, the contrast in 3:14 is between God’s work that has permanence, rather than the more abstract “timelessness.” Qoheleth does not even seem to suggest that the individual actions of God are timeless, but that God’s work cannot be thwarted or undone by human action. It suggests an ongoing involvement (יעשה האל הים) rather than a solely past act.

While certainly controversial, and not without detractors, the theme of 3:11 is that העל should be able to benefit human beings but does not as human beings remain ignorant of the work of God. Seeing as a variable length of time that begins

³¹ Exod 31:6; 35:34; 36:2.

³² Barr, *Biblical Words for Time*, 117n. 4.

³³ Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 80.

³⁴ Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 163.

³⁵ Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 106.

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from the present and stretches vastly onwards fits the context. It is a unique usage, and it hinges more on an examination of context and the other uses of עולם in Ecclesiastes than contributing itself to the examination of the word meaning. Humans comprehend that there is an indefinite future before them, but as 3:16-22 will conclude, they are unable to make use of its potential due to human wickedness.

Eccl 3:14

The work of God is at issue in 3:14. While the whole of 3:9-22 can be considered one unit, there are smaller units visible according to the following markers:

- v. 10 ראייתי
- v. 12 ידעתי
- v. 14 ידעתי
- v. 16 ועוד ראייתי
- v. 17 אמרתי
- v. 18 אמרתי
- v. 22 וראיתי³⁶

A new larger unit begins at 4:1 with ושבתי אני וראיה. The connection between 3:14-15 and 3:12-13 is through אלהים.

Qoheleth here mentions his belief, using ידעתי rather than the usual ראייתי, that everything God does will last. Qoheleth is not commenting on the past works of God but on those being done. The pattern of the verbs here is perfect (ידעתי), imperfect (יעשה), imperfect (יהיה), infinitive (negated להוסיף), infinitive (negated להוסיף), perfect (עשה), imperfect (יראו). One may thus read the verse in this way: “I know that everything God does, it will last in perpetuity; to it nothing can be added, and from it nothing can be taken away, and God does this that they will fear him.”³⁷ While Qoheleth is not denying that God’s works of the past also last in perpetuity, his focus here is to contrast the works of mortals to the works of God. What God does now endures, while those things humans do (3:1-8) are momentary and add nothing of lasting value (v. 9).

³⁶ So also Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 83.

³⁷ Isaksson, *Studies in Qohelet*, 81 translates similarly.

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The sense of עולם here is of long-enduring time that stretches far beyond the lifetime of one individual or the lifetime of many individuals. Qoheleth was not, however, concerned with giving the reader a precise sense of what עולם signifies, but rather concerns himself with the stability that is part of God's actions. He not only uses עולם as a time term, but also, and perhaps to an even greater degree, as signifying something enduring, and hence trustworthy, in the context of human temporal limitation. Its orientation in this regard is solely future looking.

Ecc1 9:6

Qoheleth's concern in 9:6 is the portion (חלק) of the dead. As we considered earlier in the discussion of יום in 9:9, a portion represents something valued that can be either tangible or intangible. Qoheleth considers the dead not to retain a portion in all that is being done under the sun, and this is irrespective of their manner of living life while they were yet under the sun. According to vv. 1-3, the righteous/wicked, good/pure/impure, sacrificers/non-sacrificers, good/sinners, and oath takers/non-oath takers all inherit מקרה אחד, which is the movement into nothingness. This represents an expansion of the consideration given to the wise man and the fool in 2:14 and humans and beasts in 3:19-20.

What is truly worthy of lament, however, is that this movement into nothingness removes all trace of their former life from existence. This strange collection of emotions enumerated as שנאתם, אהבתם, and קנאתם represent perhaps the strongest of human emotions. The first two are more obvious, but given that in 4:4 Qoheleth suggests that every עמל and כשרון come from קנאה, it is fitting to include it in the list of strong emotions. But, as Qoheleth notes, even the strongest of human emotions that drive humans perishes at death. Nothing remains of their life, and they make no further contribution to life עוד לעולם.

This is the only time in Ecclesiastes where these two terms are combined, though a similar expression can be found in Jer 31:40 and Ezek 26:21. In both of those contexts, the expression stands for a very long period of time. Ezekiel addresses Tyre in an oracle of doom. The judgement is that the city will “be no more” and “you will never be found” עוד לעולם. The expression עוד לעולם denotes permanence. This permanence is similarly displayed in Jeremiah, though here it is the permanence of blessing rather than of punishment. It is not that the

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blessing is “eternal” in the sense that it could never end, but permanent in the sense that it can be relied upon.

The sense of permanence accompanies its use in Ecclesiastes as well. Once life is complete, a human being vanishes never to return.³⁸ Like Jeremiah, this is a statement of confident that establishes Qoheleth’s argument on the importance of the present rather than a statement about the quality of time itself. עולם expresses a long-enduring span of time extending into the future, though its qualification is toward life “under the sun.”

Eccl 12:5

The final occurrence of עולם occurs in 12:5 in the expression בית עולם. There are five phrases within the fifth verse, and there is some question as to the relationship between the phrases and the human subject. Do the references to the almond tree, locust/grasshopper, and caperberry tree stand in contrast to the deterioration of human beings who go off to בית עולם?³⁹ Alternatively, do the references stand as allegorical or eschatological references to the decay of human beings?⁴⁰ There seems little reason based on the conjunctions and verbs used to posit that there is a contrast inherent in the phrases,⁴¹ and it seems preferable to read the clauses together as component parts of one analogy of decay.⁴² Thereafter, vv. 6-7 contain a much shorter and more concentrated image describing, perhaps, the moment of death or burial and the return of the spirit to God who gave it.

There are some interesting parallels between Ps 49 and Eccl, as has also been noted by Spangenberg.⁴³ While there may be, in Spangenberg’s opinion “No direct literary, ideological or theological link between Psalm 49 and the book of Qohelet,”

³⁸ Schoors, *Preacher, Part II*, 22 uses “never” to capture the sense of עולם.

³⁹ So Fox, *Time to Tear Down*, 328. It requires an emendation of וְתִפָּרַח (“and it breaks”) to וְתִפְּרוֹחַ (“and it sprouts”). The BHQ apparatus notes that α’ reads καρπεύσει, which is along the same line as Fox proposes, but this is not utilized for support.

⁴⁰ So Bartholomew, *Ecclesiastes*, 350 who suggests that even the blossoming of the almond tree in the verse is not a hopeful sign, but must be interpreted eschatologically to refer to judgement.

⁴¹ The verse begins with וְגַם, but is followed by four phrases beginning with a simple waw plus imperfect, with the exception of the clause involving בית עולם, which begins with כִּי.

⁴² Even if אֲבִינָה is “caper-berry,” the tree still “breaks.” HALOT, s.v. פָּרַר, 1.

⁴³ Izak J.J. Spangenberg, “Psalm 49 and the Book of Qohelet,” *Skrif en Kerk* 18 (1997): 328-44.

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the expression **קרבם בתימו לעולם** in Ps 49:12 is helpful in elucidating Qoheleth's **בית עולם**.⁴⁴

Here, the psalmist exclaims in a similar manner to Qoheleth that there is a similarity in the fate of the wise, fool and dolt. It indicates that **בתימו לעולם** is the “grave.”⁴⁵ Unlike Qoheleth, however, the psalmist expresses confidence in v. 16 that God “will redeem my soul from the hand of Sheol” (**יפדה נפשי מיד־שאול**), unlike those whom the psalmist has derided.

The expression in both contexts suggests permanence. In Ps 49, this permanence is in contrast to the fate of the psalmist himself who will be ransomed. Qoheleth, however, does not express such confidence in the context of his poem. The movement to **בית עולם** is uni-directional (**הלך**) and permanent rather than circular and ongoing. Like the earth of 1:4, the individual destiny of a human being is fixed in the grave, while the generations of human beings continue their movement. The expression **בית עולם** creates a picture of a lifeless corpse who has nothing else to offer anyone, even those who would surround it in order to mourn.

⁴⁴ Though Ronald F. Youngblood, “Qoheleth’s ‘Dark House’ (Eccl. 12:5),” *JETS* 29 (1986): 398 would disagree as this requires an emendation, or at least re-conceptualizing (so NJPSV) of MT’s **קרבם**. Youngblood’s thesis that **בית־עולם** should be rendered “dark house” is creative but relies on tenuous connections across a number of languages and literature types, and does not fully take into account the nuance of “darkness” in Ecclesiastes, which is not as closely connected with death as in other literature he utilizes to make his case. See the rebuttal of Jean-Jacques Lavoie, “Étude de l’expression **בית עולם** dans Qo 12,5 à la lumière des textes du Proche-Orient ancien,” in *Où demeure-tu? La maison depuis le monde biblique: en hommage au professeur Guy Couturier à la occasion de ses soixante-cinq ans*, ed. Jean-Claude Petit, André Charron, and André Myre, (Saint Laurent, Québec: Fides, 1994), 214-16. Regarding the emendation of **קרבם** to **קברם**, Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalmen*, BKAT XV/1 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1978), 517 argues “»ihr Inneres« paßt hier nicht.” He reads along with other textual witnesses, including LXX, **קברים**. Similarly, Marc Girard, *Les Psaumes Redécouverts: de la structure au sens, psaumes 1 à 50*, 2d. rev. and corr. ed., 3 vols. (Quebec: Bellarmin, 1996), 790 argues **קרבם** must be emended “en raison de la tautologie qui résulte dans l’hémistiche.”

⁴⁵ The use of “eternal houses” or an equivalent expression is not unfamiliar in the ancient world. There is an equivalent Egyptian expression (“house of eternity”, Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 364), and the expression *byt ‘lmm* occurs in the Balaam text of Deir ‘Allā. Hackett, *The Balaam Text from Deir ‘Allā*, HSM 31 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1980), 59 holds that the expression is “well enough established as an expression for the grave that we must be dealing with death here.” Similar is the conclusion of Healey, “Death in West Semitic Texts: Ugarit and Nabataea,” in *The Archaeology of Death in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Stuart Campbell and Anthony Green, Oxbow Monograph 51 (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 1995), 190, who notes that this euphemism was commonly used in the ancient world to refer to the dead. He cites Mesopotamian and late Aramaic examples of the expression “house of eternity” and suggests that the reference in Eccl 12:5 may also be a euphemism for death.

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The sense of עולם present in 12:5 therefore conforms to other usages of the term in Qoheleth. Its duration lasts long beyond the scope of the lifetime of individuals.

Summary: The Sense of עולם

The use of עולם in Ecclesiastes points toward “perpetually” as core to its sense. The earth exists perpetually (1:4), memories fade perpetually (2:16, 9:6), God’s work endures perpetually (3:14), and the state of death exists perpetually (12:5). The only two exceptions to this notion occur in 1:10, which unlike the other instances looks toward the past, and 3:11, which is more abstract and related to temporal conceptions of mental faculties rather than an event or object that endures. However, 3:11, like 1:4, 2:16, 3:14, 9:6 and 12:5, deals with the movement of time. Humans are able to perceive the movement of time into the future, but time stands in contrast to those objects and concepts that cannot move: memory (2:16, 9:6), life (12:5) or the earth (1:4). Again, the exception is 1:10, which looks back toward what has been long established in the past and remains established to the present of the narrator.

In our consideration of דור above, we noted that the generations moved but did not endure as they slide across the stage and disappear unlike other natural cycles that move but are repeated (e.g., sun, wind, streams). This contrast between movement that endures (natural phenomena, work of God), and that which ceases (human work and life) provides a poignant contrast, which is worthy of further investigation in Part Two of this work. Before beginning that exploration, however, we will conclude our investigation looking at two further temporal terms: שנה and זכרון/זכר.

שנה (6:3, 6; 11:8; 12:1)

The five uses of שנה occur in contexts where the discussion is theoretical or about the future. In 6:3,6 and 11:8, theoretical longevity is the theme introduced by אס or אל and coupled with the possibility of enjoyment. In 12:1, Qoheleth urges the youth to consider the years that lay ahead.

Eccl 6:3, 6

The central comparison in 6:3 occurs between the aged man who bears many children and lives **שנים רבות**, and the stillborn child. Qoheleth considers the stillborn child to have the better fortune if the other man's longevity and family are not satisfying to him. So in this case, the **שנים רבות** represents a long lifespan, but certainly not one vastly out of proportion with what could be obtained: longer than usual but not longer than possible. The follow-up expression, **ימי-שניו**, which we have already encountered, is conventional and expresses length of natural life. The time period represented by **שנה** falls easily within conventional calendar years.

The same comparison between the man and the stillborn child continues through v. 6, though the scale of comparison has changed significantly. Rather than the man obtaining many children and a long life, Qoheleth suggests that even if that man lives “a thousand years twice over” (**אלף שנים פעמים**),⁴⁶ yet the stillborn has an advantage if the man “enjoy[s] no good” (**טובה לא ראה**). While the comparison in 6:3 takes place between what is possible for a man and the stillborn child, the comparison in 6:6 is hyperbolic. Even in terms of biblical rhetoric, Qoheleth's 2000 years exceeds the longest recorded lifespan of 969 years (Gen 5:27).

The usage of **שנה** in these cases is unremarkable. The concept of “years” was and continues to be a conventional method of referring to the length of an individual's life.

Eccl 11:8

In the closing verses of chapter 11, Qoheleth offers praise for life (v. 7) and extols the audience to rejoice (v. 8a). Both statements can be countered with an argument about misery (days of darkness) for not every day is a blessing. To this theoretical objection, Qoheleth counters with a theoretical exhortation, “even if.” The exception introduced is living **שנים הרבה**. Even if one lived an exceptional amount of time, so the argument goes, then one should rejoice in all of them. That is, from the perspective of the audience, there should not be at the outset any time in one's life where one *plans* on lamentation over the state of one's life. On the other hand, 11:8b exhorts the audience to understand that there will be days (**ימי החשך**) where lamentation will be a part of one's life. But, in the moment that is the “now” of the

⁴⁶ HALOT, s.v. **פַּעַם**, 5 indicating a multiplier. Here, “two times/twiceover.”

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audience, no part of life should be looked upon with dread.⁴⁷ The sense of **שְׁנִים הַרְבֵּה** is, therefore, great length of life, such that would be seen as a reward for righteous living. The sense of **שָׁנָה** is, as we have seen previously, conventionally used with respect to age.

Ecc1 12:1

The usage in 12:1 is different than the others, primarily because it is not linked with **רָב**. Qoheleth here encourages youth to see a contrast between the **יָמֵי בַחֲוֵרֵתֶיךָ** and the coming time that will be **יָמֵי הָרַעָה** and **שְׁנִים** characterized by the lack of usefulness. The plural of **יָוֵם**, which is rather indefinite, receives its sense from **שָׁנָה**, indicating an indefinite period of time much shorter than the total life of an individual, but undoubtedly involving the passing of several multiples of seasons, as we have seen. The lexeme **שָׁנָה** behaves as we have already described referring to the passing of the calendar years within the bounds of an individual's lifespan.

Summary: The Sense of **שָׁנָה**

Overall, we have seen that the meaning conveyed by **שָׁנָה** is more limited than other temporal terms in Ecclesiastes, and it carries the simple nuance of the movement of the four seasons.⁴⁸

זָכְרוּ/זָכֹר (1:11; 2:16; 5:19; 9:5,15; 11:8; 12:1)

While the lexemes **עַתָּה**, **יָוֵם**, **דּוֹר**, **עוֹלָם**, and **שָׁנָה**, indicate a period of time, we enter into a different realm when we consider the use of **זָכְרוּ/זָכֹר**. Their inclusion here is justified due to their proximity to many of the contexts we have already encountered. In fact, only 9:15 occurs in a passage not previously explored

⁴⁷ Again we must ask about the rhetoric of the work. Given our previously described scenario of this work being a creation of a narrator who speaks through the mouth of the created character, Qoheleth, in order to speak words of wisdom to his son, the narrative audience is a youth. There is no reason to remove the words from this context in order to speak about the contradictory notions presented in v. 8. The fact that, on the one hand, the youth is exhorted to rejoice in every living day while, on the other hand, the youth is exhorted to remember that there will be difficult days ahead is not contradictory given the season of life. If the narrative audience were an aged man for whom difficult days were many, then the verse would meet interpretative problems. But, given the audience, the potential interpretative problem is solved by the rhetoric.

⁴⁸ Schoors includes **שָׁנָה** in his section entitled "Words Which Require No Special Analysis." See Schoors, *Preacher, Part II*, 472.

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through the lexemes for time. Since the majority of the occurrences of זכרון/זכר occur in previously discussed sections, the individual discussions will be brief noting only contribution and temporal nuance of זכרון/זכר.

Ecc1 1:11

There are two connected yet distinct types of memory loss in 1:11. First, the narrator declares that אין זכרון לראשנים. This is not such a remarkable statement if one is willing to allow for some hyperbole. Forgetfulness is not an uncommon theme in the Hebrew Bible, especially in Deuteronomy (14 times) and Psalms (34 times). What is more remarkable, however, is the narrator's next statement: גם לאחרנים שיהיו לא־יהיה להם זכרון עם שיהיו לאחרנה. This is not a comment on poor memory or mere forgetfulness, but a remarkable exclamation that human beings seem incapable of memory at all. It is not a comment on the narrator's own generation, but a denunciation of every generation. Memorials to previous generations do not exist, nor are memorials to future generations possible, in the opinion of the narrator.

But one may inquire after the content of memorials? What is the content of memory that fails to remain? It is counter-intuitive to suggest that nothing of previous generations is retained, for even the inscription to the work mentions that these are דברי קהלת בן־דוד. Even the relationship of קהלת to דוד implies some relationship to the past. Given, as well, the interest that Hebrew literature had in connecting generations in tables of nations and genealogical lists, we can assume that the author did not create a narrator wholly ignorant of this part of Hebrew literature.⁴⁹ If אין זכרון is not, then, simple awareness of the past, it must necessarily involve a certain content that is not able to survive the passage of time. We are not fully informed of this content in the introduction, but will endeavour to be sensitive to the question as we consider other expressions containing the lexeme.

Ecc1 2:16

In 2:16 we find Qoheleth musing over the fate of the wise and foolish concluding in 2:16 that אין זכרון לחכם עם־הכסיל. Here we discover something

⁴⁹ See the introduction to James T. Sparks, *The Chronicler's Genealogies: Towards an Understanding of 1 Chronicles 1-9*, ed. Steven L. McKenzie, Academia Biblica 28 (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008) for a brief introduction to genealogy lists.

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of the content of זכרון, since Qoheleth's lament questions the benefit of being wise if he will be remembered no better than the fool. It is not merely the existence of one's life that is at issue but the contribution and quality of that life that matters. As Schwienhorst-Schönberger helpfully recognizes, v. 16 is the basis of the thesis given in v. 14b.⁵⁰ The כִּי of v. 16 provides the clue to the fate to which Qoheleth refers. It is not strictly death but the loss of connection between successive generations. Even the use of מִקְרָה in 3:19 takes place in the whole context of Eccl 3 dealing with time, the passage of time, and God's ability to see the past and future contrasted to human inability (3:22). To die like an animal is to pass from memory rather than simply to cease to breathe; it is to cease to exist in any meaningful way.

Coupled with 2:18, the question of legacy comes to bear. Since it is impossible to see whether the one who comes after and inherits possessions will also inherit wisdom, the possibility of a lasting זכרון is not possible.

Eccl 9:5

In 9:5, Qoheleth utilizes the only occurrence of זָכַר. As we have already seen above, Qoheleth suggests that the dead are unable to interact with their environment and they have no connection to the living (אִין-עוֹד לָהֶם שָׂכָר), understanding שָׂכָר as being part of the human community. The rationale given is that נִשְׁכַּח זָכָרָם. The three components of זָכָר mentioned here are אֶהְבֵּתָם, שִׁנְאָתָם, and קִנְאָתָם. These are words of high emotional impact. Thus we begin to see a picture emerging of “memory” in Ecclesiastes being the sum of what makes an individual unique and how it influences and impacts others. This portrait is further informed by the method Qoheleth uses to remember others. Further in chapter 9, Qoheleth draws a lesson from a poor but wise man (9:13-15). Qoheleth tells a story of this man, but this does not appear to qualify as remembering. His life is an anecdote in Hebrew literature.⁵¹ Nothing of his love, his hate, or his jealousies is preserved. The person has disappeared out of memory. A similar anecdote could be created around the action of the fool, or the person who is alone (4:7-8). Remembrance, then, is more than having one's life become an object lesson for others.

⁵⁰ Schwienhorst-Schönberger, *Kohelet*, 223.

⁵¹ As would, perhaps, the accounts preserved in the Torah, Prophets, and Writings if the writer was familiar with these.

Ecc1 5:19

Turning our attention to the use of the verb זָכַר, we observe in 5:17-19 that Qoheleth commends eating, drinking, and to find enjoyment in toil. This ability to enjoy is a gift of God, and the gift allows humans to לֹא הָרְבָה יִזְכָּר over the days of life. The question, again, is the content of remembrance. Is this remembrance future orientated (the coming days), present orientated (how hard life is), or past orientated (what has been accomplished already)? We have already suggested earlier that the context points to understanding יְמֵי חַיָּיו as past days. This question is a past-orientated inquiry after the value of what has been done. The gift of God, Qoheleth suggests, is the ability to put off this question of יְהִירוֹן by enjoyment of the present.

We are left with this double picture of memory. On the one hand, the inability of humans to remember and to build on the lives of those who have come before is a deep frustration. Life is transformed, at best, into an anecdote. This is a tragedy for Qoheleth. On the other hand, given this larger picture, looking back upon one's own life only brings pain and sorrow, and the gift of God is to involve a man in the enjoyment of life so this reflection is avoided.

Ecc1 9:15

The anecdote mentioned earlier provides another example of זָכַר. According to this David-and-Goliathesque tale, a powerful king comes against a much inferior city. In this city was a poor yet wise man. Two general trends appear in interpretation. Either the wise man did save the city by his wisdom (מַלְטָהוּא אֶת־הָעִיר בַּחֲכָמָתוֹ), or the wise man *could have* saved the city by his wisdom.⁵² In the first case, the statement לֹא זָכַר אֶת־הָאִישׁ means that he was forgotten, whether shortly or eventually, after his action of saving the city. In the second reading, לֹא זָכַר אֶת־הָאִישׁ means that the people did not think to ask that wise man about what could be done. One can readily understand why some choose the second option in light of the proverb that follows, which speaks of a poor man's wisdom being despised (בְּזוּיָהּ), and not heeded (אֵינָם נִשְׁמָעִים). To posit that the wise man did save the city by his wisdom, and then to draw from that

⁵² See, for example, Bartholomew, *Ecclesiastes*, 312 who represents the first position, and Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 310, who represents the second.

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experience that a poor wise man's words are not heeded seems to be out of place. On the other hand, if one translates as Seow does ("he might have delivered the town through his wisdom"),⁵³ the poor man's words were not really despised nor heeded. Rather, the people forgot (לֵא זָכַר) to consult him rather than despising his words. For this reason, we do not find Seow's portrayal convincing.⁵⁴

If the wise man did save the city, how are we to link it to the proverb, which appears to lead us in another direction? Again, we have two options. First, in light of the proverb one could posit that the poor, wise man acted on his own accord and saved the city by his wisdom. No advice to others was needed at that point, and the man orchestrated and carried out some action that resulted in the city's salvation. The people, however, failed to notice the action of the man and attributed the result, salvation, to another cause. This leads to Qoheleth's observation that the poor man's words are not heeded. Second, the wise man could have given wise advice that was, in that one circumstance, heeded and it resulted in the salvation of the city. But rather than look to the wise man for his help on other matters, he was quickly forgotten. The second option seems more plausible. Failing to notice is not the same as not remembering just as ignorance is not the same as failing to remember. The anecdote, rather, describes a city responsible for their own sorrowful predicament given their frustrating inability to build upon the experiences of others. The proverb highlights this failure. Someone who obviously has something great to offer is ignored.

In this context, זָכַר is to bring to mind. Its purview is not in the distant past. For someone to have "remembered" the poor, wise man is not to recall his name or his face, but to go to him and learn from his experiences and build on his abilities. This requires going to him during his lifetime, since once his life is passed the ability to "remember," as an addition to his accomplishments, is over.

Eccl 11:8

The remaining two uses of זָכַר occur in the context of Qoheleth's final instructions to youth. In 11:8, Qoheleth's exhortation is to זָכַר ("let him

⁵³ Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 306.

⁵⁴ The NJPSV takes a similar track, but Fox, *Ecclesiastes*, 66 does not find this line convincing either as he comments, "If the wise man had not actually saved the city, how could anyone know that he *could* have done so?"

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remember”).⁵⁵ This “remembering” is to bring to mind something taught in the past that pertains, however, to the future.⁵⁶ It is the equivalent of “keep in mind” that the future holds “the days of darkness” (אֶת־יְמֵי הַחֹשֶׁךְ). Here, remembering is not to reflect over the past, but to consider what has been taught about the future. This future aspect is positive for Qoheleth. Rather than looking back to one’s past, which has been shunned both in 5:19 and 7:10, Qoheleth encourages a future orientation, if only to be future orientated toward less desirable days ahead.

Ecc 12:1

Similarly, 12:1 contains the imperative directed toward a youth that he should זָכַר אֶת־בּוֹרְאֵיךְ. Again, the “bringing to mind” of זָכַר presumes some content from the past about the creator, but this act of remembrance is to inform present and future action before (יָבֹאוּ יְמֵי הָרָעָה) evil days come (עַד אֲשֶׁר לֹא).

In these last two instances of זָכַר we are introduced to a more positive orientation in Qoheleth than can be detected in much of the work. The exhortation to remember is not directed at some distant past but to call to mind basic attitudes toward life, death, and the creator. It is not orientated to the past, however, but looking toward the present and future of one’s own lifespan as a way of considering what will be, and how one ought to orientate in the present in light of it. One cannot escape the days of darkness while living, but knowledge of these days shapes enjoyment of the present.⁵⁷

Summary: The Sense of זָכַר/זָכֹר

We have shown that memory is an important aspect of Qoheleth’s lament concerning life under the sun. It is the potential loss of his own memory in successive generations that results in his shocking declaration, “I hated life.” But, memory is a sweet sorrow in Ecclesiastes. It is a feature of what it means to be human given the awareness of time humans have been granted (3:11). It allows one to bring to mind what one has been taught and to use that information positively (11:8, 12:1). On the other hand, when it is directed at the past rather than informing

⁵⁵ Reading as a jussive with Schoors, *Preacher, Part II*, 321.

⁵⁶ TDOT, s.v. זָכַר, II, 1.

⁵⁷ Heidegger’s “being toward death.”

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present action, it is a source of pain and discomfort (2:16; 5:19). This double-edged sword forms a part of the absurdity of human existence under the sun.

Conclusions—Lexemes and Expressions for Time

We have considered in this chapter lexemes associated with time occurring less than ten times in Ecclesiastes. Together with our exploration of עַתָּה and יוֹם, we are able to conclude the following. First, our investigation of lexemes for time in the book of Ecclesiastes demonstrates that the exploration of יִתְרוֹן, a central theme in the book, does so consistently with a view to temporal themes. Many of the central passages dealing with toil and profit contain the lexemes for time we have been considering. Not only does the presence of עַתָּה and יוֹם as two of the most frequent lexemes in the book identify time as a key concept, but the presence of temporal lexemes at key movements in the work also highlight the importance of time as a central theme.

Second, our investigation of lexemes for time has demonstrated that the consideration of life and its meaning in Ecclesiastes does not take place only on one temporal horizon. The introductory poem focuses on great expanses of time as it considers the longevity (לְעוֹלָם) of the earth and the endless circuits of the natural order. The poem of 3:1-8, however, considers the actions that take place in the moment (עַתָּה). Our investigation of both יוֹם and שָׁנָה demonstrated that Qoheleth mused over spans of life, considering whether long life is a blessing (so 6:1-3), or looking toward the years of weakness (12:1). Qoheleth's musing seemed to focus on the productive years of adulthood as they involved the ability to make independent decisions. But within adulthood, a multitude of different situations and times are under discussion.

The investigation of lexemes leads also to a third consideration of time in Ecclesiastes. The horizons of time are not isolated from one another, but occur side by side. Often, the discussion of a temporal horizon is precipitated by the discussion of another. For example, the advice to a youth in chapters 11 and 12 juxtapositions temporal horizons. Youth are exhorted to remember, which is a look back presumably on their short experience of having been instructed by others. But the exhortation is to remember what has been taught about the future (e.g., the many dark days ahead) as a way of affecting the present, which is the moment in which the

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young person is living. The temporal horizons seem to feed off one another in the rhetoric of Ecclesiastes.

A further example is the oft-discussed chapter 3. There the momentary actions (vv. 2-8) are set in juxtaposition to the question of a far reaching future (עולם) contained in v. 11. While the presence of temporal horizons and the use of these horizons in relation to one another is a feature of some passages, the question arises as to whether there is a consistent scheme or mode of presentation by which we can identify horizons of time, classify, and determine how Ecclesiastes configures its message around them. In other words, do the temporal horizons further our understanding of the rhetoric of Ecclesiastes in a meaningful and consistent manner?

It is to the fuller investigation of temporal horizons that this work now turns. Part Two begins with a consideration of 1:3-11 and 1:12-2:26 (chapter 4). These two sections compose the introduction of the frame narrator as well as the introduction by Qoheleth to his own life and search. It is in these introductions that we will examine whether the reader is introduced to predictable horizons of time, and how these horizons may function with respect to one another.

Part Two: Temporal Horizons in Ecclesiastes

Chapter Four: Time in the Introduction of Ecclesiastes

Introduction

The word studies of the previous two chapters have introduced the idea that the book of Ecclesiastes weaves together both a consideration of immediate and temporally near events with longer-term, distant realities. Qoheleth can speak at one moment of his own impending death and its consequences (2:15) then consider what will take place until the distant future (2:16), before moving back to the narrative present (2:17). This movement between temporal horizons is the focus of this chapter.

As we pointed out in the introduction to this project, various scholars consider the first three chapters of Ecclesiastes as key to understanding both the main questions and recurring themes that occupy the book as a whole. Kamano, for example, suggests that the twin poems of 1:3-11 and 3:1-8 form two poles of Qoheleth's introduction giving the reader insight into Qoheleth's view of stability and instability in human existence.¹ Backhaus' work also suggests that the basic theme of the work is found in 1:3-3:22,² and Seow agrees that the first section "makes the case that everything is ephemeral and nothing is ultimately reliable," though Seow provides a modified introductory block from Backhaus by including 4:1-16 with 1:3-3:22. Within this introductory block, Seow suggests that 1:2-11 "serves as the introduction to the first block, the first half of the book, as well as for the entire book."³ For these authors, the themes and answers are introduced early in the work while the remainder considers implications of these introductory themes.

What constitutes the structure of Ecclesiastes has certainly not reach any consensus. While Kamano's rhetorical design relies on a microstructure that provides momentum to the pedagogical purposes of the work, it perhaps fails to be convincing because of its minute complexity. Also, it depends on 1:3-11 belonging to the character Qoheleth, while we consider it more defensible to begin the reading of Qoheleth's character at 1:12 where Qoheleth is introduced.

¹ Kamano, *Cosmology*, 25.

² Franz Josef Backhaus, "Es gibt nichts Besseres für den Menschen" (Koh 3,22): Studien zur Komposition und zur Weisheitskritik im Buch Kohelet, BBB 121 (Bodenheim: Philo, 1998), 23-25.

³ Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 46.

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There are a number of scholars for whom the structure of Qoheleth is more broadly defined and whose proposals are more in line with the experience of reading Ecclesiastes. While Kamano considers his approach to be “text-centered” rather than “author-centered,” even though he considers the microstructure of the work, we propose that “text-centered” will also involve the experience of the reader for whom the minute micro-structure will not be readily apparent. For example, Bartholomew suggests that “the structure of Ecclesiastes is *literary* and *organic*, as befits Qohelet’s experience, rather than logical in a scientific sense.”⁴ Similarly, Longman confesses “I do not find a clear and obvious structure.”⁵ Krüger goes so far as to say that “The question of the overall structure of Qoheleth is of limited relevance for its interpretation.”⁶ And herein lies an important connection to this project. While many have examined the microstructure of Ecclesiastes, these proposals are not convincing so as to connect the microstructure to the meaning of the whole.

Our purpose here, then, is at the macro level and the portrait of time within the work as a whole. In other words, can a discernible and consistent portrait of temporal horizons be discovered in Ecclesiastes that assists the reader in understanding the macro-sense of the work, which is the search for *יִרְרֹן*?

This is not to discount the importance of the beginning of Ecclesiastes as key to the themes occurring in the remainder of the work. The introductory poem (1:2-11) coming from the pen of the frame-narrator sets the tone for the entry into the work. With that, the introduction of Qoheleth and his autobiographical description of his search (1:12-2:26) likewise establishes the *ethos* of Qoheleth, which establishes the relationship with the reader.⁷

⁴ Bartholomew, *Ecclesiastes*, 83.

⁵ Longman III, *Ecclesiastes*, 22.

⁶ Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 8. A point Fox, *Time to Tear Down*, 149 makes with wit concerning Wright’s elaborate proposal: “the proposed structure has no more effect on interpretation than a ghost in the attic. A literary or rhetorical structure...should guide readers in recognizing and remembering the author’s train of thought.” This sums up the difficulties with most proposals for an elaborate structure in Ecclesiastes. Fox’s own commentary does not seek to elaborate structures but “tracing the movement of thought, especially within the units.”

⁷ Though Kamano, *Cosmology*, includes all of 1:3-3:9 in his opening cosmological consideration, his discussion indicates that the *ethos* section ends at 2:26 (91). Choon-Leong Seow, “Qohelet’s Autobiography,” in *Fortunate the Eyes That See: Essays in Honor of David Noel Freedman in Celebration of His Seventieth Birthday*, ed. Astrid B. Beck, Andrew H. Bartelt, Paul R. Rabbe, and Chris A. Franke (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 275 rightly points out that the biography section only runs to 2:11, though the remainder of the chapter provides comment upon the ideas

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Longman's overall structure of Ecclesiastes provides a suitable way forward, and he outlines it as follows:

Autobiographical introduction (1:12)

"Solomon's" Quest for the Meaning of Life (1:13-2:26)

The Quest Continues (3:1-6:9)

Qohelet's Wise Advice (6:10-12:7)⁸

Longman's outline has the advantage of not supposing a microstructure to the text but provides a movement explaining literary features such as the increased use of aphorisms in 7:1-12:7, the rhetorical questions that dominate the first portion of the work, and the guise of Solomon that seems to vanish after chapters 2.⁹

This provides us with a convenient breakdown to investigate the presence and function of horizons of time in Ecclesiastes by pointing us toward the important introductory pieces of 1:1-11 and 1:12-2:26. These we will investigate in this chapter. After this, we will be able to use the insights gained here to explore the remainder of the work.

Ecc1 1:2-11¹⁰ The Frame-Narrator's Introduction

The frame-narrator begins the investigation with a conclusion: all is **הבל**. The limits of **כל** are not yet established, but from the reader's standpoint the limits of what **כל** could mean are heightened and await further information. Added to this is the ambiguity of **הבל** itself to which a great deal of literature has been directed. While the introductory sentence is startling, it does not introduce a clear direction for the reader.

introduced up to 2:11. In his commentary, Seow takes the whole of 1:12-2:26 as a unit with a chiasmic structure formed by 1:13-2:26 (Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 144).

⁸ Longman III, *Ecclesiastes*, 22. While Addison G. Wright, "The Riddle of the Sphinx: The Structure of the Book of Qoheleth," *CBQ* 30 (1968): 313-34 does advocate for a microstructure, based on his patterns he also detects a break at 6:9 between the two halves of the work in 1:12-6:9 and 6:10-11:6 (324).

⁹ Though Y.V. Koh, *Royal Autobiography in the Book of Qoheleth*, BZAW 369 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2006) would argue that the Solomonic fiction is an integral part of the whole work, most do not. For example, Rüdiger Lux, "'Ich, Kohelet, bin König...': Die Fiktion als Schlüssel zur Wirklichkeit," *EvT* 50 (1990): 331-42 would end the *Königfiktion* at 2:26 seeing in it an *inclusio* with the statement of 1:13.

¹⁰ While the frame-narrator is responsible, of course, for 1:1, it provides only an introduction in the form of contextual information without providing any temporal information of the sort we are investigating.

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The question posed by the frame-narrator in v. 3 does potentially have great temporal implications: **מִהֲיִתְרוֹן לְאָדָם בְּכָל-עֲמָלָו שִׁיעֲמַל תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ**. Again, two ambiguities are significant here: the scope of **אָדָם** and the phrase **תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ**. The scope of **אָדָם** considers whether the question is directed at an individual, or is a question directed at an entire species.¹¹ The significance of the choice should not be overlooked for in doing so the reader either dooms the life of any one person to fruitless labour, or that of the whole human race! While there are cases where **אָדָם** may, in fact, be a substitute for **אִישׁ**,¹² on the whole commentators suggest that the concern of the work is humanity as a whole.¹³ The proximity of v. 4 that clearly speaks of **כָּל דָּוָר** gives the reader a good indication that we are dealing with a universal question: What advantage does the human race have in all its toil at which it toils under the sun?

The second temporal consideration is brought about by the expression **תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ**. The expression refers most broadly to the whole of the biosphere, but the frame narrator connects it explicitly to the sphere of human life and effort. It is a broad term meant to demonstrate the universality of the work's purview.¹⁴ In this sense, it carries meaning both for space and time. Since **אָדָם** implies the plural "humankind," **תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ** implies the length of time humans have been "under the sun" as well as the breadth of their labours ("anywhere").

This temporal level, which concerns multiple generations of human beings, we can designate *generation time*. In making this designation, we suggest that the

¹¹ The distinction also has great significance for its relation to contemporary society. For example, Ellen F. Davis, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs*, Westminster Bible Companion (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 170 suggests that Qoheleth asks not a utilitarian but an existential question: "What is the human value? Is there any meaning? Will it make me any more of a person?" Qoheleth begins with a question that many people stop asking early in life. But if **אָדָם** is a question about human beings rather than a human being, the question is vastly unlike asking what is the meaning of "my" life.

¹² Whybray, *Ecclesiastes*, 38. See also Dahood, "Canaanite-Phoenician Influence," 202-03 who suggests the Phoenician influence accounts for the preference of **אָדָם** over **אִישׁ**, especially in the singular.

¹³ For example, Schoors, *Preacher, Part II*, 45; Kamano, *Cosmology*, 44; Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, 5; Schwienhorst-Schönberger, *Kohelet*, 151.

¹⁴ This it shares in common with other works considered to be "wisdom." James L. Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1981), 62 suggests that sages in ancient Israel had the broad goal of describing "Life," while Roland E. Murphy, *The Tree of Life: An Exploration of Biblical Wisdom Literature* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 1 suggests generally that wisdom "deals with daily human experience in the good world created by God." Wisdom material in general has universal concerns.

text itself point the reader towards an observation or judgement that focuses upon what is experienced over generations.¹⁵ It has in mind the movement of human communities across the stage of time. The genealogical lists indicate that the Hebrews understood the movement of time in terms of generations coming and going, and the question posed by the frame-narrator is the question of accomplishment (יִתְרוֹן) in light of this movement. In this case, generation time is a time lacking in accomplishment, since the question מִהֲיִתְרוֹן has already been answered in 1:2.

Turning to vv.4ff, we have already seen above how this verse contains a juxtaposition of times. We can now provide the movement of the דֹר with a name, generation time, and see how this is contrasted with the temporal permanence of הָאָרֶץ. While there is continuity between the immovability of the earth and the constant movement of generations, which also seems permanent, the difference is one of directionality. The דֹר movement is in one direction only. Generation time is contrasted with *nature's time*:¹⁶ that is, the permanence of the creation surrounding us. At this stage all this comprises observation only. There is such a thing as generation time and nature's time, but no value judgement is yet implied to the contrast.

Nature's time continues in vv. 5-9, though the emphasis is on the continuous cyclic nature of the natural bodies of the sun, the wind, and the steam. Their permanence is cyclic while the earth is constant. Nevertheless, all natural states endure while the generations pass. While the notion of the rising and setting of the sun has some connection to human methods of measuring time, the parallel sections dealing with wind and streams do not carry such a relationship. What is articulated here is a continuity and a permanence. In v. 8, the same natural phenomena are at issue. "All such things" are יָגַעִים,¹⁷ which serves as a predicate adjective. This

¹⁵ This is opposed to an observation in the text that may be *true* over generations, but applies these to a different time scale. For example, a maxim such as "a stitch in time saves nine" may be true across the generations, but the focus of the maxim is the act of sewing, which is not a generational act but a situational one.

¹⁶ Again, nature's time arises from the text as it leads the reader to consider temporal permanence rather than generation transience.

¹⁷ NJPSV has "All such things." Fox, *Ecclesiastes*, 6 contends that the MT lacks "such" and therefore the translators have "unnecessarily restrict[ed] the scope of this generalization." The use of the definite article, however, makes this rendering possible. While the definite article in Hebrew is used loosely, there are many cases where a noun with the definite article is perfectly determinate "where the thing can be pointed to, and where, therefore the **demonstrative** pronoun could be used" (J-M

word occurs twice elsewhere. So, in Deut 25:18 **יָגַע** is parallel with **עֵיף** (HALOT “tired, exhausted”) while in 2 Sam 17:2 it occurs together with **רַפָּה** (HALOT “slack, feeble”). In neither case does **יָגַע** have the sense of “causing weariness” or “wearisome.” The suggestion of HALOT to use the sense of “striving” here makes little sense.¹⁸ The sense is most naturally “weary” rather than “wearisome.” Thus, v. 8a reads “All such things are weary” in a similar way that the poem describes the sun as “panting” (**שׁוֹאֵף**) back to its place.¹⁹ The natural objects are weary in the eyes of the poet because they never cease. This weariness is not able to be put into words, however, since human beings have nothing to which to compare it (**לֹא־יִוָּכַל אִישׁ לְדַבֵּר**). At the same time, the human appetite to watch these natural phenomena is not satisfied by either seeing nor hearing of them, in the same way that those who come from unpredictable climates never tire of speaking about the weather!²⁰ The tireless efforts of the personified elements is a source of constant amusement and discussion for transient human beings.

Finally, v. 9 summarizes the result: there is nothing new. While natural phenomena are in view throughout the poem, the use of **תַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם** reminds the reader that the viewpoint is clearly a human one. So from a temporal standpoint, vv. 4b-9 all maintain the view of a time belonging to nature that is observable by yet separate from the experience of human beings.

The perspective changes, however, in vv. 10-11. Now there is a character (**אָמַר**) who makes a statement (**רֹאֵה־נָה חָדָשׁ הוּא**) with which the narrator takes issue (**כִּבְרַר הָיָה לְעַלְמִים אֲשֶׁר הָיָה מִלְּפָנָיו**). This is followed by a further, more encompassing statement by the narrator that there is no longer any remembrance **לְאַחֲרֵנִים** or **לְרֵאשִׁינִים**. There is some debate whether these designate people or

§137f emphasis theirs). Fox himself argues that in light of the continuation of v. 8 (**לֹא־יִוָּכַל אִישׁ לְדַבֵּר**), it is better to take **הַדְּבָרִים** as “words.” Fox also must expand the notion of **יָגַע**, which as used also in Deut 25:18 and 2 Sam 17:2 has the sense of “tired” to mean that they are “inadequate to communicate the immensity of the repetitions in which the world is locked.” The NJPSV expansion using the definite article as a demonstrative appears, in our opinion, as more justifiable than Fox’s.

¹⁸ HALOT, s.v. **יָגַע**, 2.

¹⁹ Schwienhorst-Schönberger, *Kohelet*, 162 states that “wird in diesem Bilde der zu ihrem Aufgangsort atemlos zurückjagenden Sonne gebannt.” Others place the emphasis on the hurriedness of the sun’s action rather than upon its exhaustion. Cf. Roger Norman Whybray, “Ecclesiastes 1,5-7 and the Wonders of Nature,” *JSOT* 41 (1988): 107-08.

²⁰ Natural phenomena have often been a source of reflection in the Hebrew Bible (cf. Ps 8; 104:19; Job 38:1-38) and in later Judeo-Christian traditions (e.g., John 3:8).

things, though there is good reason to consider it a reference to former and latter generations.²¹ So while the frame-narrator uses an example of an unspecified individual making a statement about a particular occurrence, v. 10 only serves as a particular example toward a much larger point concerned with generations of human beings: remembrance and memory are not passed on. In this way, vv. 10-11 mirror the concern of v. 4 and its focus on generation time.

The frame-narrator thus introduces the reader to two horizons of time: generation time and nature's time. Judgement is not passed on either of these times. Though **הבבל** is employed frequently in Ecclesiastes, it is not found in either the prologue or the epilogue of the work except as attributed to Qoheleth (**אמר קהלת**). The reader is led, however, to see that while the continuous circuits of nature lead to stability, the movement of generation time leads to forgetfulness.

Ecc1:12-18 The Introduction of Qoheleth

Qoheleth introduces himself in v. 12 by reference to his royal position. This royal position in the guise of King Solomon gives him the pedigree in terms of wealth and wisdom for the task upon which he has embarked and will now illustrate. He describes this task in v. 13: "I gave my heart to seek and spy out with wisdom concerning everything that is being done under the heavens;²² it is a wicked business God²³ gave to humans to do." We are introduced to a new temporal level with the direct speech of Qoheleth. His investigation is the pursuit of one individual over the course of his time as king over Jerusalem. Here we encounter a third layer of time: *lifespan time*.²⁴ As defined by Qoheleth, it is the time of his adult years when the search for "everything that is being done under the heavens" engrosses his existence. Once again we are introduced to the conclusion before the investigation proper

²¹ Both Fox, *Time to Tear Down*, 169, and Longman III, *Ecclesiastes*, 75 prefer things or events, but many others prefer to see these as a reference to people including Barton, *Ecclesiastes*, 76; Bartholomew, *Ecclesiastes*, 112; Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 68; Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 48; Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 111; and Schoors, *Preacher, Part II*, 202-03.

²² MT **השמים** supported by LXX and Syriac. Vulgate has *sole* ("sun"), as does the Targum, and is a harmonization with the usual expression **תחת השמש**.

²³ MT **אלהים**. LXX **ὁ θεός**. In the opinion of Goldman (BHQ, 67*), G Qoh conscientiously translates the article, and it is likely that the *Vorlage* contained the article, and is judged to be the superior reading.

²⁴ We encounter lifespan time in Ecclesiastes when the text focuses the reader on events that occur over a considerable span of the life of an individual or a group, or when the text addresses the meaning or action of an individual's whole existence.

informing the reader that what he has discovered with respect to the בְּנֵי הָאָדָם is a wicked business (עֵינַי רָע). This conclusion is based in v. 14 on the personal observation of Qoheleth and what he has seen (רָאִיתִי). As others have noted, the use of רָאָה for Qoheleth implies an experience borne from careful consideration.²⁵

The remainder of the observations in chapter 1 are at the level of lifespan time. The focus of reflection in vv. 15-18 is in the area of wisdom. In Qoheleth's own estimation, he has accomplished a great feat and has been able to take his intellect to heights never before encountered among the royals who came before him. But the characterization of this lifespan body of work is decidedly negative as it is characterized by רַעִיוֹן/רַעוּת רוּחַ and הַבֵּל (vv. 14 and 17). In particular, the negative evaluation is directed toward "work" (מַעֲשֶׂה), and the full scale of wisdom.²⁶ The rationale behind this characterization seems to be the increasing awareness of the plight of human suffering (v. 13 and v. 18). But the lifespan search of Qoheleth has not brought him any decided joy or satisfaction.

Ecc1 2:1-11 Pleasure

The second chapter continues Qoheleth's personal reflections though what is sought is not wisdom but experiences that can be considered part of the good life: pleasure and possessions. The first two verses introduce the reader to yet a fourth layer of time in Ecclesiastes: *event time*.²⁷ Here the events Qoheleth proposes to pursue are pleasure (שְׂמֵחָה) and enjoyment (טוֹב). These are specific actions, which Longman describes as "self-oriented. He tried to find joy in drinking and sex."²⁸ These actions are events that are of short duration in and of themselves. However, the context of these events is still, in this section of Qoheleth's description of his journey, lifespan time. As Qoheleth goes on to say in v. 3, his search is still to "see what is good for humans that they should do under the heavens the *number of days of*

²⁵ Schoors, *Preacher, Part II*, 75; Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 121. Antoon Schoors, "The Verb רָאָה in the Book of Qoheleth," in "Jedes Ding hat seine Zeit": *Studien zur israelitischen und altorientalischen Weisheit*; Diethelm Michel zum 65. Geburtstag, ed. Anja A. Diesel, BZAW 241 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1996), 240 concludes that it does not carry only one connotation, but in its context it suggest observation, examination as well as "realization or conclusion."

²⁶ That is, Qoheleth set his heart to consider wisdom, madness, and folly.

²⁷ We encounter event time in the text when it focuses the reader's attention at isolated occurrences in the lives of individuals. Events are often of short duration, but if they are temporally distinct and limited whether in minutes, hours or even days, we will refer to these as occurring in event time.

²⁸ Longman III, *Ecclesiastes*, 86.

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their life” (emphasis mine). As we considered in chapter 2, the italicized expression indicates a large swath of a person’s days upon the earth (lifespan time). Qoheleth’s search is to find some angle that provides focus and shape to the lifespan of an individual. But in the context of lifespan time, the events described in vv. 1-3 hold no meaning for Qoheleth. They do not provide *‘eternity’* at the level of lifespan time.

We find a similar pattern in the vv. 4-10 though the focus here is not audacious living, but projects and possessions that Qoheleth undertook on a lavish scale (*הגדלתי מעשי*). Qoheleth describes these as activities of the past that are part and parcel of the fabric of his lifetime. The evaluation Qoheleth passes upon these building blocks is radically different than his previous evaluation, however. Having given his heart over to every pleasure,²⁹ Qoheleth declares that *לבי שמח* (“my heart rejoiced in all my toil”).³⁰ Here, finally, is a positive evaluation from Qoheleth. It is not a positive evaluation of his lifetime, but a positive evaluation of the individual actions (event time) that formed a part of his lifespan search for *‘eternity’*. The events themselves merit a positive evaluation when considered on their own value rather than as part of lifespan time.

The commendation of these events, however, does not last as the consideration of Qoheleth moves in v. 11 to the consideration of lifespan time once again. Qoheleth employs in v. 11 the verb *פנה* to indicate a re-orientation of thought toward his words (*בכל-מעשי*) where the preposition *ב* indicates a toward orientation.³¹ Qoheleth’s reflection reveals that the sum of his work was “vanity and a chasing after wind.” This movement between event time to which Qoheleth expresses pleasure, and the larger span of time (lifespan time) results in a negative evaluation of all his activity.

²⁹ In fact, Qoheleth expresses his self-gratification as giving to both his eyes and heart. This same pairing occurs in 11:9. Wilfred G.E. Watson, “The Unnoticed Word Pair ‘eye(s)’/‘heart’,” *ZAW* 101 (1989): 408 conducted an investigation of the pairing of eyes and heart in Near Eastern languages, and found that in most cases, eyes and heart occur in synonymous parallels, as it does here in Ecclesiastes.

³⁰ The use of the preposition *ב*, which here represents the joy being “in” labour, is also attested in Prov 5:18 and 2 Chr 20:27. Mitchell J. Dahood, “Qoheleth and Northwest Semitic Philology,” *Bib* 43 (1962): 352 suggests that the usage is also confirmed by an Ugaritic parallel.

³¹ Cf. Job 6:28 in which the preposition *ב* follows *פנה* as an indicator of direction. See also Barton, *Ecclesiastes*, 92 and Schoors, *Preacher, Part II*, 368.

Ecc1 2:12-17 Further Reflections on Folly and Wisdom

The division between v. 11 and v. 12 is more to do with content than grammar as v. 12 also involves a turn (פְּנִיָּה). This turn, however, is not backward to see what has been accomplished but toward what Qoheleth has already appraised as a “chasing after wind”: הוֹלִלּוֹת, חֲכָמָה, and סְבִלּוֹת. While the next portion of the verse is difficult,³² the sense is that Qoheleth is looking ahead to what his successor might do with what has been left to him. The assumed result will be that nothing new will occur during the reign of the successor. This focus on what happens beyond Qoheleth’s own lifespan indicates a return to generation time as he considers his own actions in light of what will take place after him. Qoheleth extends his frustration and projects this upon his successors. The negative evaluation of his own lifespan is not due to a fault in him, but is systemic to life itself.³³ The successor is condemned to the same meaninglessness that Qoheleth has experienced at the level of lifespan time.

Qoheleth shifts his temporal reflection once again in v. 13 by returning to his own experience, as indicated by רִאשִׁיתִי. His experience has told him that wisdom is better than folly.³⁴ Again, we enter into a double-layered observation. The experience of Qoheleth is at the level of lifespan time, since his reflections are the sum of his observation. But wisdom is, by its nature, an evaluated property; that is, it is the result of action rather than a theoretical construct. The distinction between a wise and foolish choice is that the first ends with a good result while the second does not. Wisdom is seen when it is acted out in event time. Verse 14 speaks of the wise man having “eyes in his head” while the fool walks in darkness; in other words, the

³² Fox, *Ecclesiastes*, 15 notes that the Hebrew of v. 12b is “almost unintelligible.” LXX has τίς ὁ ἄνθρωπος but the sense of the statement seems to require some form of עֲשֶׂה following. Barton, *Ecclesiastes*, 93 translates based on a text that reads מַה הָאָדָם יַעֲשֶׂה שִׁבּוּא אַחֲרַי הַמֶּלֶךְ as suggested by BHS. Goldman (BHQ, 72*) suggests this is unnecessary and the phrase has the meaning of “what is [man’s] value?” In the opinion of Schoors, *Preacher, Part I*, 156, the least strained interpretation is for v. 12bβ to be the answer to 12bα, as NRSV and others indicate. This does require a shift from עֲשֶׂה to the singular עֲשֶׂה, as in LXX and Syriac. Fox, *Time to Tear Down*, 181 translates מַה הָאָדָם as “what will the man be like...” focussing on *what kind of person* rather than on what a person does. We have chosen the conventional understanding considering what the successor might do.

³³ This provides the link between the view of the frame-narrator in 1:9, where there is nothing new under the sun, and Qoheleth’s view that the successor is incapable of undertaking a truly unique course of action.

³⁴ Though Qoheleth struggles with the fate of the wise and fool in vv. 15-16, he does not deny the basic fact that wise living is better than foolish living. See Fox, *Ecclesiastes*, 15.

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wise see and understand the consequences of actions while the fool does not.³⁵ So Qoheleth's reflection in vv. 13-14 is on event time and the superiority of the ability to make wise choices. The general disposition toward wisdom is positive.

As has happened already in v. 10, however, when Qoheleth expands the range of his view to include lifespan time, the positive evaluation disappears: "But even I know that one fate befalls all of them" (v. 14b). The use of "fate" (מִקְרָה) carries the danger of being closely associated with divine directive. This is certainly not the sense in the three other uses outside of Qoheleth where it indicates, "what happens to someone not through their own will or actions and without any known instigator."³⁶ In this case, what befalls both the wise person and the fool is the grave. The contrast is between wise living made of moment-by-moment choices, and the sum of those choices, which amounts to nothing given the inevitability of death for both those who live wisely and those who live foolishly. This reflection on lifespan time is then directed toward Qoheleth's own life in v. 15, and then to the level of generation time in v. 16 since there is no "enduring" memory of the wise person or the fool.³⁷ As we have seen, עוֹלָם has been used previously by the frame-narrator to speak of nature's constancy (1:4) and of human generations (1:10). That עוֹלָם signifies generation time is understood by the use of זְכוֹרָן ("remembrance"), which is a faculty of human beings and their communities. Both Qoheleth's lifespan reflection and the generation reflection in vv. 15-16 have a decidedly negative tone.

Qoheleth concludes this section with his most shocking revelation of all: he hated life. This summary statement of his reflection upon his life is again at the level of lifespan time and is characterized as "vanity and striving after wind." Thus, Qoheleth has found nothing redeeming in either lifespan time or generation time that qualifies as a positive contribution to the search for יִתְרוֹן.

³⁵ Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 69 states "wisdom improves one's ability to orient oneself in the experience of reality."

³⁶ HALOT, s.v. מִקְרָה. Fox, *Ecclesiastes*, 16 emphasizes that מִקְרָה is "what befalls someone, not something 'fated' or preordained in the strict sense." In 1 Sam 6:9, it is the suffering of the Philistines that is caused either by Yahweh or "by accident" (מִקְרָה). Similarly in 1 Sam 20:26, Saul attributes David's absence from dinner to מִקְרָה apparently because of being unclean. When used in Ruth 2:3, it represents a happenstance whereby Ruth went to glean grain in a field belonging to a relative of Elimelech.

³⁷ Schoors, *Preacher, Part II*, 222 who quotes approvingly the RSV (also NRSV) translation, "For of the wise man as of the fool there is no *enduring* remembrance" (emphasis his).

Ecc1 2:18-26 Qoheleth's Final Self-Evaluation and Solution

The negative tone continues in v. 18 as Qoheleth recounts his second “hate”: **שִׂמְחָה מְכַל-עֵמֶל**. Here we find a reversal of v. 10 where Qoheleth **שִׂמְחָה מְכַל-עֵמֶל**. Qoheleth is working on a different temporal level than in v. 10, however, as the mention of life “under the sun” and the backward glance at toil indicates that Qoheleth continues to operate on the level of lifespan time. Qoheleth’s discomfort arises from the knowledge that the work and the toil he struggled with amounted to nothing substantial. Therefore, event time that had before given him such pleasure is now seen as a source of loathing given how events fit into the larger schemes of time. In particular, it is the generation reflection beginning in v. 12 that is the catalyst for the loathing of lifespan time in v. 18a. One can see this connection again in v. 18b as Qoheleth returns to a generation reflection: “for I must leave it behind with the man who will come after me.”³⁸ The characteristic of the one who comes after Qoheleth, specifically whether the person will exhibit wisdom or folly, is the reflection in v. 19. This continues the same generation consideration as v. 18b, and the whole is decidedly negative with the summary phrase **גַּם-זֶה הַבָּל**. This generation reflection then impinges on the event reflection of v. 20 for Qoheleth in which he “turned to rid my heart of illusions” concerning his toil.³⁹ As in v. 11, the value of the total diminishes upon reflection. And like v. 11, the catalyst for this diminution is the generation consideration that follows.

Verse 21 looks toward the outcome of an individual’s toil when those resources are passed on to someone in the following generation. It is of great interest, however, that the notion of an heir is not mentioned here. The very impersonal **אָדָם** occurs in v. 18 and v. 21. The concern of King Qoheleth is not the passing of one’s resources from father to son, but a more general dispersion of one’s efforts to those coming afterwards. The cause of Qoheleth’s concern is that what one person has built “with wisdom and knowledge and skill” becomes the “portion” (**חֵלֶק**) of another. The earlier use of **חֵלֶק** in 2:10 certainly did not refer exclusively

³⁸ The NRSV practice of changing masculine singular forms to plurals in order to maintain gender neutrality raises an interesting point. Since we have already indicated above that in some cases **אָדָם** conveys a plural sense of “humanity” in general rather than an individual, is Qoheleth’s reflection here meant as a single generation complaint (“I leave it to the one who comes after”), or a multi-generational complaint (“I leave it to those who come after me”), or is it simply a reflection of the vast wealth being distributed to a multitude of individuals one generation after?

³⁹ Fox, *Ecclesiastes*, 17. Schoors, *Preacher, Part II*, 387 approves of this translation of **שָׁחַ**.

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to a physical possession since the subject of the verse was enjoyment. It conveys some sort of possession within the limitation “both in time and space.”⁴⁰ Qoheleth’s lament is that everything one person labours for becomes the portion of the one who did not labour for it. But the notion of one thing becoming the possession of another is not in itself the difficulty for Qoheleth. This can be demonstrated by looking at 4:8, where the one toiling without an heir, or at 5:12-13 where the one with an heir unhappily has nothing to leave him due to a bad venture. The tragedy for Qoheleth is not the leaving of one’s toil to another except that it becomes *his* portion and the memory of the toiler fades.⁴¹ This was certainly the concern of Qoheleth in vv. 15-16 where wisdom is the theme. The progression is as follows:

wise living does not leave a lasting legacy (vv. 15-16)

so I hated life (v. 17)

so I hated wealth (v. 18a)

wealth does not give a lasting legacy (vv. 18b-23)

In this progression, generation time is clearly in view and is the standard by which other levels of time come to be judged. That is not to say that each verse concerns itself with generation time, for as we have seen there is a movement back and forth between a generation view and a lifespan view. In the generation view, the unique contributions of an individual become lost in the continuous exchange of one’s portion to the following generation.

It is to generation time Qoheleth returns in v. 22 to consider “What has the man for all his toil?” Here Qoheleth employs the verb יָרַח, which, as Michel suggests, emphasizes the enduring aspect of the action.⁴² The question posed by the frame-narrator in 1:3 thus comes to be Qoheleth’s question. What endures from all the toil of human beings throughout their generations, understanding בְּנֵי אָדָם here as humanity in general? While Fox argues that it is a rhetorical question designed to prompt the answer “nothing,” such a reading seems overly harsh. Qoheleth’s answer

⁴⁰ Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 151.

⁴¹ Contra Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, 26 who declares that Qoheleth’s position is “insensitive to the considerations of family.” But as Fox, *Time to Tear Down*, 188 counters, there are indications that the notion of passing material on to heirs is desirable from Qoheleth’s viewpoint (4:8; 5:3) and so the bequest here may not be from father to son.

⁴² Michel, *Untersuchungen*, 33. Michel has pointed out that 2:22 compares nicely with 1:3, and one would expect that the two statements give roughly the same sense, with the exception that יָרַח in 2:22 emphasizes an enduring aspect.

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is never an unqualified “nothing.”⁴³ Rather, the question strikes at the heart of lifespan time prompting reflection over the sum of an individual’s life in the grander scheme of humanity. Qoheleth’s statement in v. 23 flows from his own observation on how he addresses the question: life is full of pain and vexation.

The interplay between lifespan and generation time ceases in v. 24 as Qoheleth suggests something that is good. In fact, there is nothing better (אֵין־טוֹב) (בְּאָדָם־שֶׁ־). The great good is eating, drinking, and to “find enjoyment” in toil. The last of these, וְהִרְאָה אֶת־נַפְשׁוֹ טוֹב בַּעֲמָלוֹ, is variously translated. Broadly speaking, the main difference results from understanding the ב of בַּעֲמָלוֹ as either an instrumental (“by”/“with”), or as directional (“in”).⁴⁴ While בַּעֲמָל occurs several times, Schoors notes that 8:15 provides a greater contextual sense to its meaning. Here enjoyment is something that will “accompany man in his toil” as a means of support.⁴⁵ Brown supports this reading by suggesting a connection between 2:24 and 2:10 where 2:24 reveals that “work enjoyed in and of itself is what Qoheleth has come to value, particularly in light of his royal failure to guarantee an ‘enduring remembrance.’”⁴⁶

The time frame advocated in 2:24 is event time since by nature eating, drinking, and labouring are events. These events are very positive in Qoheleth’s estimation, and have received divine sanction and approval when they are isolated from their connection with lifespan or generation time.

⁴³ Fox, *Time to Tear Down*, 188 himself qualifies the statement: “This does not mean absolutely nothing, since even if a man has no “profit” he can still have a “portion” in his work, which means he will possess *something*.” If one defines a rhetorical question as “A question asked for the sake of persuasive effect rather than as a genuine request for information, the speaker implying that the answer is too obvious to require a reply” (OED, s.v. “rhetorical question”) then if the answer is qualified to the extent Fox indicates, it is hardly rhetorical. One can easily get the sense that Qoheleth wants a more positive answer to this question, but one is not easily forthcoming. That the question is asked in a variety of circumstances and with various examples indicates a desire for a better answer and not simply for rhetorical effect.

⁴⁴ Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 118 uses the directional (“in their toil”) as does Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 58, Longman III, *Ecclesiastes*, 107 (“enjoy their toil”), Galling, “Prediger”, 92 (“bei seiner Arbeit”), Whybray, *Ecclesiastes*, 63 (though he gives space to both possibilities), Herbert C. Leupold, *Exposition of Ecclesiastes*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1966), 74, Barton, *Ecclesiastes*, 78, and William P. Brown, *Ecclesiastes*, Int (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 37. Fox, *Time to Tear Down*, 185 chooses an instrumental rendering (“through his toil”) as does Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 70 (“with his earnings” though in the explanation he appears to give the directional sense “in his toil”).

⁴⁵ Antoon Schoors, “Qoheleth: The Ambiguity of Enjoyment,” *Concilium* 4 (2000): 36.

⁴⁶ Brown, *Ecclesiastes*, 38.

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This is the second mention of divine activity in human life. As we have seen in 1:13, Qoheleth sees the divine as responsible for the heavy lot given to human beings over the course of the generations (generation time). But in 2:24, Qoheleth suggests that the divine sanctions the beneficial use of event time for human beings, if they are engaged in the proper activity.

Verse 25 provides another difficult verse both from a text-critical point of view as well as from the point of view of reading.⁴⁷ While admitting that the rendering of חַוֵּשׁ is difficult, a precise rendering is not essential to our purposes here since אָכַל has previously occurred in v. 24 and represents event time. We thus expect that חַוֵּשׁ, whether as a compliment to אָכַל or its antithesis, also represents an event. No solution solves every one satisfactorily. Whatever the overall meaning of the verse, the temporal level it operates upon is still event time.

Verse 26 carries on with the theme of what is good in life. In this case, those who please God receive wisdom and knowledge and joy from him. This represents event time once again since wisdom and knowledge relates to the ability to make good choices in the moment of choice just as שִׂמְחָה is purely situational.⁴⁸ It is to generation time, however, that Qoheleth turns in v. 26b where the חַוֵּשׁ (“sinner”), after gathering turns this over to the one who pleases God. As others have noted, חַוֵּשׁ is not necessarily the perpetrator of moral evil, but one who has somehow “displeased God” in some fashion.⁴⁹ It is informative, then, to note that the activities that are given to the one who pleases God are at the level of event time, while the one who displeases God spends a lifetime gathering but then passes these on to another generation. The person who fails (חַוֵּשׁ), in this case, is the one whom God does not allow to see the value of event time, but instead provides benefit to another in

⁴⁷ The two issues facing the interpreter are: (1) what does חַוֵּשׁ mean in this context and; (2) should one read חַוֵּשׁ or חַוֵּשׁ? While Goldman (BHQ, 75*) suggests that the suffix must refer to God, and prefers LXX αὐτοῦ, see the detailed discussion of the issue in Jan de Waard, “The Translator and Textual Criticism,” *Bib* 60 (1979): 509-29. In the end, de Waard holds that the best evidence supports MT (חַוֵּשׁ) though he suggests that the first person suffix could be seen as a quotation from God, and that, given the presence of אָכַל, one would expect חַוֵּשׁ to have either a synonymous or an antithetical meaning. The synonymous meaning close to “enjoy oneself” has greater support, in his opinion. See, for comparison, Lohfink, *Qoheleth*, 22 who chooses “enjoy” while Longman III, *Ecclesiastes*, 107 chooses “worry.”

⁴⁸ In v. 2, for example, it is paralleled with שִׂמְחָה, a clearly situational activity.

⁴⁹ Fox, *Time to Tear Down*, 189-91. Fox’s argument is cited approvingly in Schoors, “Theodicy,” 402.

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generation time. This was Qoheleth's own concern in vv. 18-21, and the passing on of one's work for the benefit of future generations is "vanity and striving after wind."

Conclusions

The introductory sections, including both the frame-narrator's opening (1:1-11) and the self-disclosure of the character Qoheleth (1:12-2:26), reveal both the presence of horizons of time in the unfolding narrative and that these horizons of time are placed next to one another purposefully to highlight the positive and negative of the work's overall philosophy in the search for *יִתְרוֹן*.

The four horizons of time we have detected were described as:

Generation time: We encountered this layer of time in 1:3, 4, 10-11; 2:11-12; 16, 18b-19; 21-23; 26b. In those places, the text focuses upon the movement of time throughout the lifespan of one individual and considers the broader scope of human action across time. In the work of the frame-narrator, it is evidenced by the failure to pass on knowledge between those who were before and those who will come after. In Qoheleth's words, it appears in conjunction with the passing on of physical possessions as well as wisdom and knowledge. While the frame-narrator's portrait of generation time is not characterized negatively but as a "fact" that there is no assured inheritance of awareness between generations, Qoheleth's own reflections betray a negative attitude toward generation time. The coming generations cannot build upon Qoheleth's work (2:12) and he cannot ensure that the next generation will be characterized as wise (2:18b-19). Both the frame-narrator and Qoheleth agree that the hope of *יִתְרוֹן* cannot be located in the passing and progress of succeeding generations.

Nature's time: Nature's time is introduced only by the frame-narrator as a foil for generation time. Its presence in 1:4 and 5-9 indicates that its main characteristic is stability. While there are cycles in the natural world, these cycles are constant, have no determined end, and endure long beyond the time of any human generation. While human communities also continue, their cycle involves the passing of succeeding generations without memory or progress. In this way, there are similarities between nature's time and generation time. But while nature's time is endlessly renewing, the passing of the generations involves forgetfulness and ineffectuality. While judgement is not passed on these events by the frame-narrator, in light of the quotation of Qoheleth that all is meaningless, it does introduce a

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certain melancholy to the frame-narrator's introduction to be picked up upon further on.

Lifespan time: We are defining lifespan time as indicating those portions of Ecclesiastes that lead the reader toward observing life through a broad lens, which considers evaluation of lifelong efforts or noting sustained patterns. In the case of Qoheleth's his first-person reflections, it often involves looking back on his lifetime of work. We have designated 1:13-18; the overall context of 2:1-3, 4-10; 2:11, 13-14, 15, 17, and 18a as expressing lifespan time. Qoheleth is consistent in his negative portrayal of the accomplishments of his lifespan. It is often characterized as רעות רוח and הבל. In Qoheleth's case, his lifespan time was the great experiment to test what sustained pursuit would produce something of lasting value. His determination is that such an avenue of pursuit does not exist. Thus, lifespan time offers nothing that can produce lasting value or satisfaction.

Event time: The final layer of time to which we were introduced in Qoheleth's initial self-disclosure is event time, which forms part of 2:1-2, 4-10, 13-14, 20, and 24-26a. We have defined event time as those descriptions of activities that are of limited duration, quantifiable, and concrete. Enjoyment is an event by Qoheleth's definition as it involves eating and drinking. While wisdom is not an event in itself, we have considered that wisdom is accessible only through decisions or events that demonstrate the characteristic of bringing about a good result. Qoheleth's descriptions of building projects and possessions are a description of a series of events involving work and labour. And with the introduction of event time we find an important juxtaposition in Qoheleth's evaluative schema.

At the introduction of event time in 2:1-2 and 4-10, the context of describing these events is lifespan time. That is, Qoheleth describes activities that he has undertaken in the past over the course of his years. It is the attitude of reflection that makes the overall context lifespan time, though the description itself contains reference to individual activities. The evaluation of these activities when considered as a whole, was decidedly negative as they did not fit together to form a greater achievement at the lifespan level (see especially 2:11). However, at the level of the individual activity, Qoheleth found some pleasure and fulfilment (2:10).

Thus, it is to the level of event time that Qoheleth returns in vv. 24-26a when he dispenses the advice over what is good. He summarizes his search for the key to

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generation or lifespan time achievement by pointing instead toward what is achievable, which is the enjoyment of individual events notwithstanding their contribution to lifetime achievements.

Our contention that approaching the frame-narrator's introduction and the initial self-disclosure of Qoheleth through the lens of horizons of time provides clarity to Qoheleth's enterprise and helps frame his conclusions regarding what is good and positive for human beings during their days upon the earth. Qoheleth has not revealed himself to be a nihilist⁵⁰ or a "preacher of joy."⁵¹ Rather, Qoheleth has made an empirical and calculated search and found that only life operated at the level of event time produced satisfactory results. In fact, reflecting at the level of lifespan time causes Qoheleth great regret and "hatred" of life.

The temporal scheme we have developed allows us to approach the remainder of Ecclesiastes in order to inquire how these temporal horizons are developed, whether these are presented consistently, and how they assist the reader to engage Ecclesiastes. It is to these considerations that the next two chapters turn.

⁵⁰ Sekine's article, "Qohelet as a Nihilist," in *Transcendancy and Symbols in the Old Testament*, ed. Seizo Sekine, BZAW 275 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1999), 91-128, claims Qoheleth was a nihilist.

⁵¹ See, for example Roger Norman Whybray, "Qoheleth, Preacher of Joy," *JSOT* 23 (1982): 87-98 and responses to his claims in Schoors, "Ambiguity of Enjoyment" and William H.U. Anderson, "A Critique of the Standard Interpretations of the Joy Statements in Qoheleth," *JNSL* 27 (2001): 57-75.

Chapter Five: Furthest Reaches: Nature's, Generation and Lifespan Time

Introduction

The observation and development of the categories of nature's time, generation time, lifespan time and event time provide us with the means to further explore how Qoheleth continues to characterize these horizons of time and, ultimately, how he utilizes these horizons of time in the unfolding narrative.

As we have observed that event time utilizes the other horizons of time as a foil in Qoheleth's introduction, we will break the investigation of the horizons of time into two main divisions. The greater horizons of time are explored in this chapter, while Qoheleth's ongoing characterization of event time will form the basis for chapter 6.

Nature's Time

We noted in the introductory material of Ecclesiastes that nature's time was not a part of Qoheleth's own self-disclosure but was introduced through the frame-narrator. In fact, except within the closing poem of 12:1-7 with reference to almond trees, grasshoppers and the caper bush, Qoheleth himself does not address natural phenomena directly at all.

While Qoheleth does not further nature's time with strict attention to natural cycles and circuits, he does address certain phenomena that are disconnected with the activity of human beings and inhabit a layer of time connected to and yet distinct from human beings. Thus, we may discuss a number of Qoheleth statements about the realm of time inhabited by the divine in this discussion of nature's time.

The introduction of God's work as something independent of human activity first occurs in 3:11. While in both 1:13 and 3:10, God is the giver of ענין, it is packaged together with the participation of human beings. However, beginning in 3:11, the work of God (מעשה) is portrayed as viewable rather than something in which humans participate. In this way, it is much like the movement of the heavenly bodies.

The temporal aspect is given by the introduction of העלם. The business of human beings is not only to be occupied with tasks, but to perceive that their task

takes place in the movement of time. The reference to **מראש ועד-סוף** and **עלם** with reference to God's works places us outside of the mere passing of human generations and instead involves long-standing, permanent structures.

The evaluation of this time hinges on the rendering of **מבלי אשר**. If this is “yet” or “so that,” then the sense of the verse is clearly negative; human beings are unable to fathom God's action within nature's time. On the other hand, if one renders **מבלי אשר** as “without which,” it becomes a statement of fact that we have been given the means to see God's work and understand it. This is not to say that understanding occurs, but acknowledges that understanding is possible.¹ Nature's time is not seen as an enemy of human life, but neither does its presence elicit any comfort. It quite simply “is” with or without the contribution of those who move within it. In this way, it stands as a foil for human endeavour in the same way that the earth and natural phenomena stand as a foil for human impotency in 1:3-11.

The vocabulary of 3:14 bears similarity to 3:11 advocating the continuity of God's work. What God is doing in Qoheleth's present (“everything that God does”) will continue to endure into the indefinite future.² There must be some comprehension on Qoheleth's part of what these actions of God must be in order to propose that they are permanent. Indeed, the ability to see God's works must be available to the wider community since the purpose is to produce continual reverence among human beings.³ What God undertakes is lasting. What humans undertake is forgotten. The use of **האלהים עשה שיראו מלפניו עשה** is, as Isaksson suggests, in an absolute sense: “God it is, who acts, to the end that people may fear

¹ Our position here, again, is that vv. 10-15 paint a more positive portrait of God's interaction with humanity. The giving of **עולם** is a benefit to human beings and contextually fits with the remainder of vv. 12-14, which reflects positively on life “under the sun.” It is only with the introduction of wickedness and injustice in 3:16, which are human failings, that the tone of the passage turns decidedly negative. This portrait allows Eccl 3 to fit easier with the theology of Genesis 1-11 where the creations, and not the creator, are blamed for the greater human predicament. Similarly along these lines see D.M. Clemens, “The Law of Sin and Death: Ecclesiastes and Genesis 1-3,” *Them* 19 (1994): 5-8.

² The NJPSV translates, “I realized, too, that whatever God has brought to pass will recur forevermore,” but the use of the past tense for **עשה** is different from other standard translations, which prefer the present. The idea of “recurrence” for **יהיה** may be influenced, as Fox, *Ecclesiastes*, 24 suggests, by harmonizing with 1:1-11 and the cycles presented there.

³ Schoors, “Theodicy,” 393 summarizes the meaning of 3:14 as “God's action not being attained by human influence.”

him.”⁴ The whole of v. 14, then, concerns itself with indefinite periods in the future that are independent of human involvement and represents nature's time. This same temporal horizon continues in v. 15, which makes a similar statement to 1:9 though with different temporal emphases.

Table 2 Comparison of Eccl 3:15 and 1:9⁵

3:15		1:9	
מה־שהיה	“That which is”	מה־שהיה	“That which is”
כבר הוא	“has already been”	הוא שיהיה	“is that which will be,”
ואשר להיות	“and what will be”	ומה־שנעשה	“what is done”
כבר היה	“has been before” ⁶	הוא שיעשה	“will be done again”

The presence of כבר in the second phrase of 3:15 pushes the temporal scope of the verse back into the past. While it is conceivable that 3:15a could have the sense of “what has been already had been,” we agree with Isaksson that it is “unlikely that Qoheleth would be so specific about facts in the past. The whole emphasis in the book lies on the actual life under the sun.”⁷ The temporal perspective of the two verses is also quite different despite their similarity in appearance. In 1:9, the narrator stands in the present comparing the present to the future without making reference to the past. In 3:15, Qoheleth stands in the present comparing the present to the past, in the first case, and the future to the present in the second.⁸ The last part of the verse, while providing the reader with some difficulty, likely has the sense of

⁴ Isaksson, *Studies in Qohelet*, 81. This is followed by Schoors, *Preacher, Part II*, 80. In this way the suffix conjugation translates as a present in line with the present of עשה rather than giving it a past orientation and obscuring the sense of the verse, such as the NRSV's “I know that whatever God does endures forever;...God has done (?) this, so that all should stand in awe before him.”

⁵ Taken from Isaksson, *Studies in Qohelet*, 75 and 82.

⁶ NRSV “already is.” Isaksson finds agreement with Schoors, *Preacher, Part I*, 173, who states that כבר היה “clearly refers to the past.” Barton, *Ecclesiastes*, 98 is the only commentator surveyed that translates as the phrase as present tense.

⁷ Isaksson, *Studies in Qohelet*, 82.

⁸ This is a possible reading, which has the advantage of symmetry and treats both instances of היה in the present tense.

“God seeks what has already been sought”⁹ indicating that God’s actions are never new but consistent and long lasting.

Consistency is also part of Qoheleth’s reflection in the transitional unit that begins at 6:10.¹⁰ The first portion of the verse appears straightforward and mirrors what the reader has already encountered in 1:9 and 3:15: “That which is (שֶׁהָיָה), is already (כִּבְרָ) given a name.”¹¹ The time designated by שֶׁהָיָה is the present as indicated by the presence of the adverb כִּבְרָ immediately following. It makes little sense to make a comment about the past in the context of humans wrestling with forces greater and stronger.¹² That would leave open the expectation that something could change in the present. Better is the use of the present, whereby הָיָה “is best interpreted as referring to the present life under the sun, with a nuance of pantemporal validity.”¹³ The judgement is that which takes place in the present is merely a reflection (נִקְרָא שֶׁמֶן) of the past making the statement as a whole “pantemporal.”

The use of the Niphal in 6:10 naturally leads to the question of who designated its name. Although not explicitly designated, “the series of passive constructions in 6:10, God, the determiner of names, is the implied subject.”¹⁴ As with 3:15, we can retain the name nature’s time though, in a sense, we are not dealing with a simple duration of time but a quality of time; that is, the verse does not make it clear *when* a particular action is designated but only that it reflects in the

⁹ Fox, *Ecclesiastes*, 24. This is the majority view from commentators and indicates that God continues to do what God has already done. This fits well with the context of v. 15 as well as the response of Qoheleth in v. 16 where wickedness, surprisingly, continues to flourish because God does not change his ways. Isaksson, *Studies in Qohelet*, 82 refers to the בִּקְשָׁ of v. 15b as iterative: “God is constantly calling back that which is past.” See Schoors, *Preacher, Part II*, 107-09 for other proposals.

¹⁰ Many see a break between 6:9 and 6:10. For example, Kamano, *Cosmology*, 126 who follows the chiastic structure proposed by Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 46. Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 106, 113, 116 and Longman III, *Ecclesiastes*, 148, 156, 159 also break at 6:9 though they do not recognize the chiastic structure proposed by Seow.

¹¹ Isaksson, *Studies in Qohelet*, 85.

¹² So KJV “That which hath been is named already.” Fox, *Time to Tear Down*, 247 also argues that 7:24 shows that מִה־שֶׁהָיָה is more precisely a past perfect rather than the simple past. Strangely, Fox, 265 writes that מִה־שֶׁהָיָה “signifies “that which happens,” as in 1:9; 3:15; and 6:10” and thereby takes away its temporal aspect altogether.

¹³ Isaksson, *Studies in Qohelet*, 88.

¹⁴ Brown, *Ecclesiastes*, 68. So most commentators, though Ogden, *Qoheleth*, 103 thinks it unlikely without providing an alternate solution.

present that which has already occurred in the past. There is an ambiguity in the temporal scope and a mystery that presupposes the place of the divine.

The second phrase in the verse—וְנִדְעַ אֲשֶׁר־הוּא אָדָם—proves difficult with scholars proposing multiple solutions including emendation,¹⁵ reading against the Masoretic accents,¹⁶ or admitting to some unique grammar.¹⁷ If we retain the reading “that what man is, is known” (so Schoors) the statement makes another pantemporal statement regarding human beings at all times and all places. Again, the use of the Niphal suggests that the knowledge is the providence of the divine and so reaffirms the designation of nature’s time.

The final clause of 6:10, however, is not from the divine perspective but a human one. It is the statement of an individual who marvels (or despairs) at the utter lack of power human beings possess in the face of a much more powerful divine force. The use of יָרִי with the preposition עִם is unique in the Hebrew Bible and has the sense of “contend with” rather than “pleading a case” or “executing judgement.”¹⁸ Human action, whether taken individually or corporately, does not have the power to make any change or dent in the basic fabric created by nature’s time.

The immutability of nature’s time is also the subject of 7:13. The strength of the declaration that God’s work is unbending also comes from the contrast between 7:13 and 7:11-12. Here we find that the passing on of wealth or wisdom from one generation to another is trivialized in light of the imperviousness of human action to the divine work. The foundational aspects of God’s work cannot be undone by the passing on of either money or wisdom to succeeding generations.

¹⁵ For example, Fox, *Time to Tear Down*, 247 modifies MT’s וְאָדָם לֹא יוֹכַל to וְאָדָם וְלֹא־יִיכַל.

¹⁶ For example, Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 130 translates as “and it is known that it is; man cannot indeed argue with one who is stronger than he.”

¹⁷ For example, Schoors, *Preacher, Part I*, 127 who suggests that the “best interpretation seems to be that the relative pronoun contains its antecedent in itself: “that what man is, is known.” Isaksson, *Studies in Qohelet*, 85-88 reads the proper name, Adam, but his suggestion lacks credibility since there are no linguistic clues to read a proper name, and it does not make the phrase any easier in the context. While it is possible that the reference could conjure up images of the play on words between אָדָם and אֲדָמָה, it seems unlikely, given the frequency of אָדָם in Ecclesiastes. The interrogative pronoun מַה indicates a thing rather than a person (so J-M §144c).

¹⁸ HALOT, s.v. יָרִי. The NRSV uses the plural (“dispute with those who are stronger”) and thereby obscures the possibility that the verse refers to God (W. Sibley Towner, “The Book of Ecclesiastes,” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible, Vol. 5* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997), 322).

Summary: Nature's Time

Nature's time does not form the center of Qoheleth's investigation into the profitability of life and it arises only in 3:11, 14; 6:10 and 7:13. It represents a level of time of which human beings are cognizant but are unable to touch or affect in any meaningful way. It is the realm of the works of God, which Qoheleth describes as unbending and unending. Nevertheless, through nature's time Qoheleth's thought is shown to be consistent with that presented in the frame-narration insofar as there are permanent structures giving shape and form to human life. Neither Qoheleth nor the frame narrator express overt negativity to this phenomena, but Qoheleth's reaction could be characterized as resignation to the unchangability of what forms the larger backdrop to human action. This human action is active in what we have designated generation time, which we will now consider.

Generation Time

There are locations in chapters 3, 4, 6, 7 and 9 where Qoheleth targets what we have deemed generation time: judgements and descriptions that take place outside of the lifespan of any individual person and pertaining to or affecting those who come afterwards.

Qoheleth makes a remark seemingly in passing at the end of chapter 3, but it makes a significant contribution to our view of generation time. We will deal with 3:18-21 more thoroughly under the heading of lifespan time, but it is significant to notice the juxtaposition of times in v. 22 as the event time declaration "a human should rejoice in his work" (v. 22a) is placed next to the generation time observation in v. 22b, "who can bring him to see what will be after him." Qoheleth deals in both vv. 18-21 and v. 22b with the certainties and uncertainties. Qoheleth is certain that death comes to humans and beasts in the same way. What is uncertain is whether there is any afterlife that values human existence over that of beasts. Similarly, Qoheleth is certain that the generations go on after the passing of any individual, but what is uncertain is what this future holds. In light of these certainties/uncertainties, the greatest good is to embrace enjoyment in toil. Qoheleth presents generation time as impenetrable, opaque, and off-limits to the wondering gaze of human beings.

We find a similar statement in 6:12b. We included 6:10-11 above in the discussion of nature's time, but the final clause of 6:12 echoes the sentiment of 3:22b: "For who can declare to a human what will be after him under the sun?" As

with 3:18-22, there is a juxtaposition of times in the closing verses of Eccl 6. The permanence of God's work in 6:10-11 results in the question of what is useful and good for humans to accomplish while they live under the sun. The key temporal expression in 6:12a is **מִסְפַּר יְמֵי־חַיֵּי הַבָּלֹו**, which we have determined earlier is an expression referring to the whole of one's life, and this is confirmed through the use of the parenthetical expression **וַיַּעֲשֶׂם כָּצֶל**, which refers to the totality of life. All life is, according to this expression, spent as a brief and transient shadow.

Qoheleth's challenge, then, is for someone to come forward and declare what is good at the level of lifespan time. Qoheleth himself has already explored what is good, but as we shall see, this exploration has pointed toward enjoyment in event time. The challenge here is to devise a better and grander solution. Qoheleth extends his incredulity from those who would speak authoritatively about lifespan time to those who would seek to speak about generation time (v. 12b). What will occur "under the sun" following the death of any given individual is not for others to discern.¹⁹ The particle **אֲשֶׁר** here takes on a causal sense approaching **כִּי** "for, because."²⁰ Human beings are unable to deal effectively with the different temporal horizons and find themselves aware of other possibilities (so 3:15) but bound to the present layer with which one is consigned to labour.²¹ Generation time remains obscure.

The presence of generation time in 4:2-3 offers a different view as it does not focus on the passing of generations but a comparison between them. In light of the existence of oppression in 4:1, Qoheleth considers the relative benefits of those

¹⁹ Contra Fox, *Time to Tear Down*, 248 who suggests **אֲחֵרָיִי** means "'afterwards,' 'in the future' ... here with reference to future events in one's lifetime." The use of a similar expression in 3:22 surrounded as it is with references to death makes it natural to assume that "after him" speaks generationally rather than merely "in the future." Fox has a valid point that in 7:14 the meaning is certainly not "after him" in the sense of after his death. The context of that expression is quite different, however, and there is no reason to insist that each instance of **אֲחֵרָיִי** requires the same temporal content especially given that the reader would not yet know of its usage in 7:14. Schoors, *Preacher, Part II*, 201-02 is also willing to have the two instances express different temporal values.

²⁰ Schoors, *Preacher, Part I*, 142 suggests the usage here is uncertain, but seems to be causal. The other option, suggested by Aarre Lauha, *Kohelet*, BKAT 19 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1978), 120 is a result clause ("folglich"), though he admits it is difficult.

²¹ Ludger Schwienhorst-Schönberger, "*Nicht im Menschen gründet das Glück*" (*Koh 2,24*): *Kohelet im Spannungsfeld jüdischer Weisheit und hellenistischer Philosophie*, HBS 2 (Freiburg: Herder, 1994), 158-59 suggests the question is about what *can* be sought in the days of life that is good, and the question in 6:12b is therefore not rhetorical but a plea for the answer Qoheleth has already given. However, we suggest that Qoheleth's question is not about what is good "*im Leben des Menschen*" as Schwienhorst-Schönberger suggests, but rather it is a *lifespan* question of what is good over the course of a whole of life. The operating temporal scheme is an important question in the interpretation of the verse.

members of different generations: the dead, the living, and the not yet existing. Anyone who has experienced life, whether living or dead, is disadvantaged compared to those who have not yet been. This characterization in light of oppression suggests that Qoheleth negatively characterizes the movement of time itself as this movement is characterized by pain and suffering.

The section of Eccl 7 from vv. 10-14 contains a number of juxtapositions with respect to horizons of time. While we noted 7:13 above in the discussion of nature's time, a fuller exploration of this small section is warranted here as it reflects generation time. Perhaps one of the strongest statements in Ecclesiastes demonstrating the contrast between horizons of time comes in 7:10. Here the question of comparing ages and times is definitively labeled as **לֹא מִחִכְמָה** ("not from wisdom"). While the value of wisdom for Qoheleth is tenuous, the characterization in the introduction suggested it does contain some value (so 2:13-14). The denunciation of the question in 7:10 as being "not from wisdom" is severe indeed.

The temporal reach of **הַיָּמִים הָרִאשֹׁנִים** is not specified, though the use of **רִאשֹׁנִים** and **אַחֲרֵנִים** in 1:11 in the frame-narrator's introduction has the sense of previous generations perhaps stretching far into the past and the future. This seems to capture the sense used here.²² It is the idealization of a former age, presumably known through stories and tales,²³ is at issue here. This comparative aspect of generation time is of little value in Qoheleth's viewpoint, since it attempts to enlighten current circumstances in light of those in the past. But since the longer stretches of time do not tell a beautiful cosmic tale of either human progress or God's handiwork, these sentiments are merely a distraction.

The preposition **עִם** creates an interpretive challenge in 7:11 for the relationship between **חִכְמָה** and **נַחֲלָה** hinges on its function. Schoors suggests that while the rendering "together with" for **עִם** has a strong pedigree being found in LXX, Vg and Tg, "it does not fit the context in which wisdom and wealth are compared."²⁴ But what is this comparison?

²² Though both Barton, *Ecclesiastes*, 140 and Fox, *Time to Tear Down*, 255 suggest it is within the lifespan of an individual.

²³ Or traditional wisdom as in the case of Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 249.

²⁴ Schoors, *Preacher, Part I*, 202.

Schoors uses Fox as an example of a text showing how v. 12a and 12b explain v. 11a and 11b.

- 11a Wisdom is as good as an inheritance
- 11b an advantage for those who see the sun.
- 12a For to be in the shelter of wisdom is to be in the shelter of silver,
- 12b but the advantage of knowledge is that wisdom keeps it possessor alive²⁵

Interestingly, Fox's position developed in later works. His 2004 work follows that of 1999 suggesting that the best rendering is "together with" since "[w]isdom is especially effective if one has a material inheritance to back it up."²⁶

The comparison in v. 12, however, suggests an either/or rather than a both/and relationship between wisdom and silver. Bartholomew is right that there is an equation rather than a comparison: "For to be in the shadow of wisdom is to be in the shadow of money."²⁷ The verb-less clause here need not suggest a reciprocal relationship, however, and may be rendered as a comparison.²⁸ For example, Prov 11:22 suggests:

A golden ring in the snout of a pig—
a woman beautiful but without sense.²⁹

נזם זהב באף חזיר אשה יפה וסרת מעם

The comparison in this case is carried by the simple verb-less clause. The waw connector in Eccl 7:12b may well be a disjunctive given that two other instances of וַיִּתְּרוֹן preceded by a waw introduce clauses of contrast.

Eccl 5:8 וַיִּתְּרוֹן אֶרֶץ בָּכַל הִיא מִלֶּךְ לְשֹׂדֵד נֶעְבֵּד:

Eccl 10:10 אִם-קָהָה הַבְּרוֹזֹל וְהוּא לֹא-פָנִים קָל קָל
וְחִילִים יִגְבֵּר וַיִּתְּרוֹן הַכְּשִׁיר חֲכָמָה:

²⁵ Schoors, *Preacher, Part II*, 17. Using Michael V. Fox, *Qohelet and his Contradictions*, JSOTSup 71 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1989).

²⁶ Fox, *Ecclesiastes*, 47 and Fox, *Time to Tear Down*, 256.

²⁷ Bartholomew, *Ecclesiastes*, 250.

²⁸ As Ch. W. Reines, "Koheleth on Wisdom and Wealth," *JJS* 5 (1954): 82 notices, this would contradict the illustration in 9:16 about the poor sage.

²⁹ Roland E. Murphy, *Proverbs*, ed. Bruce M. Metzger, David A. Hubbard, and Glenn W. Barker, WBC 22 (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998), 79. As Murphy will go on to say (83), "The comparison is not between a beautiful woman and swine, but between one who lacks good sense and the decorated swine."

Chapter Five: Furthest Reaches: Nature's, Generation and Lifespan Time

The effect of the contrast limits the comparison between money and wisdom; both are good but only wisdom is able to “give life.” Given the structure and nuance of v. 12, we must maintain that **עם** in v. 11 is close to “as” rather than “together with.”

The passing on of wisdom and wealth indicates that generation time is in view. In this case, the movement of wisdom from one generation to another is viewed positively. The addition of **יתר לראי השמש** reminds the reader, however, wisdom is the providence of the living rather than of any benefit to the generation that has passed, which left the legacy of wisdom. While leaving the inheritance is of value, it is only of value to the recipient rather than the giver. The trivializing of generation time is further enhanced through the comparison with v. 13 whereby nothing is able to contend with God's decrees. The foundational aspects of God's work (nature's time) cannot be undone by the passing on of either money or wisdom to succeeding generations.

The advice of 7:14a, which we will discuss in the following chapter dealing with event time, leads to the familiar refrain: “so that a human may not find out anything after him.” The use of **אחריו** refers to a time after death, as it does in all its other occurrences in conjunction with a human subject, and so is indicative of generation time.³⁰ Qoheleth again expresses his belief that the events that will overtake the next or any future generation are uncertain and unforeseeable.

The final chapter with reflections on generation time is Eccl 9. The first four verses further illuminate Qoheleth's reflection. A few significant terms exist in 9:1 to which we must devote our attention in order to discern their significance. First, Qoheleth speaks of three groups (**עבדיהם, חכמים, צדיקים**) that are “in the hand of God.” The nature of being “in the hand of God” is not defined and one's view of the level of determinism in Qoheleth will influence the nuance of this expression.³¹ Along with this phrase is the temporal question: is Qoheleth making the statement about an afterlife, or is the statement about the present life only? Krüger and Michel represent the two positions: Krüger favors the view that it is the active life of the

³⁰ Eccl 2:12, 18; 3:22; 6:12; 7:14; 9:3; 10:14.

³¹ Samuel L. Adams, *Wisdom in transition: Act and Consequence in Second Temple Instructions*, ed. John J. Collins, JSJSup 125 (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 137 summarizes three main lines of interpretation as: 1) God directly controls all things; 2) God affixes consequences for actions; 3) God rewards the righteous (following Michel, *Untersuchungen*). See Dominic Rudman, *Determinism in the Book of Ecclesiastes*, JSOTSup 316 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 2001).

righteous and wise that is at issue,³² while Michel suggests the fate of the righteous and wicked after death is in focus.³³ Schwienhorst-Schönberger has suggested, based on the work of Assmann,³⁴ that the dichotomy in the modern mind between “life” and “afterlife” is questionable, and the notion of “life” in can cover both.³⁵ To this question we will return momentarily.

Second, the expression **גַּם־אֹהֶבָה גַּם־שֹׂנְאָה** is ambiguous, and commentators are split on whether it refers to the love/hate of God or the love/hate of the righteous and the wise. The majority suggest that the reference is to the love/hate of God with the sense that even the righteous and wise cannot know what they will experience from the hand of God.³⁶ Schwienhorst-Schönberger, for example, argues that the immediate context makes it clear that the attributes are God's. His reasoning lies in the message of vv. 2-3 concerning the single fate of the righteous and the wicked, which has already been addressed in 2:14-15, 3:19-21 and in 3:16-17. This indicates that the fate of the righteous is unpredictable and subject to God's judgment in a similar fashion as the fool, the animals, and the wicked.³⁷ This view is not without dissenters, however. Seow suggests that a typical translation, such as NRSV's “whether it is love or hate one does not know” would expect **אִם...אִם** rather than **גַּם...גַּם**. The 80+ uses of the double **גַּם** in the Hebrew Bible divide neatly into two categories. When used in conjunction with a negated verb it comes to have the sense of “neither,” while in other cases it indicates addition (both).³⁸ In no other case in the Hebrew Bible does it have the sense of “either.” On the other hand, there are numerous instances of this sense with **אִם...אִם**.³⁹ If the sense of **גַּם־אֹהֶבָה גַּם־שֹׂנְאָה**

³² Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 167. He suggests Wis 7:16 as a suitable parallel.

³³ Michel, *Untersuchungen*, 180. Interestingly, Michel suggests Wis 3:1-3 as a suitable parallel.

³⁴ Jan Assman, *Zeit und Weigheit im Alten Ägypten: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Ewigkeit*. Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1975.

³⁵ Schwienhorst-Schönberger, *Kohelet*, 442-43. Thus, he supports Michel's claim that the viewpoint is the afterlife.

³⁶ The view, for example, of Barton, *Ecclesiastes*, 157; Bartholomew, *Ecclesiastes*, 296; Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 159-60; Fox, *Time to Tear Down*, 291 and Longman III, *Ecclesiastes*, 227.

³⁷ Schwienhorst-Schönberger, *Kohelet*, 444.

³⁸ E.g., Zeph 1:18 “Neither their silver nor their gold (**גַּם־כֶּסֶפָּם גַּם־זָהָבָם**) will be able to deliver them (**לֹא־יִוָּכַל לְהַצִּילָם**) on the day of the wrath of the LORD”; Jer 14:18 “For both prophet and priest (**כִּי־גַם־נְבִיא גַם־כֹּהֵן**) ply their trade in the land.”

³⁹ It has this sense in at least 18 occurrences including, for example, Exod 19:13 “whether animal (**אִם־בְּהֵמָה**) or a man (**אִם־אִישׁ**), he/it shall not live”; Eccl 5:11 “Sweet is the sleep of the worker, whether little (**אִם־מְעַט**) or much (**וְאִם־הֶרְבֵּה**) he should eat” and 12:14 “whether good (**אִם־טוֹב**) or evil (**וְאִם־רָע**).”

וְגַם is conjunctive rather than two mutually exclusive situations, it is preferable to see this as referring to the love and hate of the righteous and wise.

This being the case, we suggest it preferable to interpret the verse in the temporal scope we have been developing. The use of two positive groups, the wise and the righteous, is significant here implying that their judgements are sound. The implication is that whether the righteous and wise find something valuable (אֶהְבֶּה) or distasteful (שִׁנְאֶה), the longevity of those things is in the hand of God. Even the value judgements of the righteous and wise do not affect the longer aspects of time; that is, their values have no affect upon generation time.

The last phrase, אִין יוֹדַע הָאָדָם הַכֹּל לִפְנֵיהֶם, is difficult with לִפְנֵי either having a spatial or a temporal sense, as Seow has noted.⁴⁰ But Krüger also correctly notes that while לִפְנֵי can be used temporally, it points to the past rather than the future.⁴¹ The spatial understanding then seems to fit better indicating that no one is able in the larger accounting of time to track the potential or progress of anything that currently lies before them, even those who are righteous and wise.

Qoheleth, after having observed that even the actions and attitudes of the best members of society have little prognosis for long-term survival, Qoheleth moves to a comparison between what surely would be considered the religious ideal and its opposite (v. 2). His contention is that there is a common fate (מִקְרָה) for all, mentioned both before the list of actions/attitudes and following in v. 3. The whole situation is referred to by the expression זֶה רָע, which various commentators recognize as the superlative: a most רָע situation.⁴²

The reader is again confronted by the question of what is it about death that strikes Qoheleth as רָע. Here we must identify the sense of רָע, which occurs twice in v. 3. Is one or both of these instances referring to moral evil?⁴³ Or is the sense more of an unfortunate situation in the sense of NJPSV “that is the sad thing/hearts full of sadness.” Longman, for example, holds that the expression in v. 3b

⁴⁰ Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 298.

⁴¹ Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 166.

⁴² Barton, *Ecclesiastes*, 159; Fox, *Time to Tear Down*, 292 “a superlative does seem required here”; Longman III, *Ecclesiastes*, 227.

⁴³ So, for example, Bartholomew, *Ecclesiastes*, 302 who parallels מִלְאֲרָע in v. 3 with Jer 17:9 וְאִישׁ מִכָּל הַלֵּב מִכָּל הַלֵּב מִכָּל הַלֵּב.

לֵב בְּנֵי־הָאָדָם מֵאֵרָע must refer to moral evil in order to make it consistent with the meaning of רָע in v. 3a. He offers little evidence why the use of רָע in v. 3a must be moral evil, other than his consistent take that the work is subtly critical of God throughout.⁴⁴ Perhaps more revealing for the sense of רָע is its parallel to הוֹלָלוֹת. Both attributes are said to reside in the hearts of human beings. In other instances, הוֹלָלוֹת parallels שְׂכָלוֹת (1:17) and סְכָלוֹת (2:12; 7:25), which themselves are connected with the search for חִכְמָה. In these contexts הוֹלָלוֹת is not connected with morality but with “ignorance, error or stupidity.”⁴⁵ Given that הוֹלָלוֹת stands in parallel with רָע in 9:3, we are led toward an understanding of רָע in the manner of “misfortune,” hence “sadness” in NJPSV.⁴⁶

Turning to the question of why death is considered רָע, we are again reminded that for Qoheleth the sadness of death is not in ceasing to be but in the inability to create something larger than ourselves that will endure. In the comparison between the living and the dead in vv. 5-6, the benefit of the living is that they still retain שְׂכָר, a reward for their work. Furthermore, everything of the dead perishes whether their loves, their hate or their jealousy. The living still have the opportunity to partake in life while the dead vanish and were as if they had never been. The one fate (מִקְרָה אֶחָד) of v. 2 and v. 3 is, in this context, not simply death but the effect of death and time: people, their accomplishments, their most cherished or despised moments, all vanish.

Temporally, then, we designate vv. 1-3 as generation time given that Qoheleth is looking at the long lasting effects of the life of the wise and righteous whose actions are continually in the hand of God through the veil of death. It is characterized negatively because no discernible distinction exists at the level of generation time that would help human beings discern good actions from better actions.

⁴⁴ See, for example, Longman's understanding of עֵינֵי רָע in 1:13, where he evaluates the NRSV's “an unhappy business” as an “ill fit” to the “acerbic attitude of Qoheleth.” As we have seen throughout this study, however, Qoheleth is not so direct in his criticism of God as Longman and others suggest. We suggest time, especially the longer stretches of time, is the immediate enemy.

⁴⁵ Schoors, *Preacher, Part II*, 443.

⁴⁶ HALOT, s.v. רָע, B 3a suggests “evil” but the gloss in B 4a is “misfortune,” which fits this context better.

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Following a brief foray into lifespan time in v. 4, Qoheleth returns to generation time in vv. 5-6 looking at the ineffectual position of the dead that endures לַעֲוֹלָם. While in other locations לַעֲוֹלָם has been an indicator of nature's time, the context here is human life and the cessation of memory. It is an ongoing absence rather than an ongoing substance that warrants our designation as generation time. Participation in life (v. 4) is positive, while death is loss. Even those events and items that lay at the heart of an individual's life (love, hate, envy) pass away with that individual. This demonstrates, again, that it is not simply death but the removal of life and memory that perplexes Qoheleth. All traces of existence vanish with the passing of life at the level of generation time.

The final mention of generation time in 9:10 pits event time against generation time. The work of one's hand is an event, and Qoheleth's imperative is to undertake this work in light of the fact that there is no opportunity for work after death. The positive value of work is in comparison to the alternative: the absence of work in the ongoing generation span known as Sheol.

Summary: Generation Time

While nature's time lay outside the capacity of human action and becomes the resting ground of divine action, generation time is an arena within which humans strive and work. But as we have demonstrated, Qoheleth's presentation of generation time is no more progressive or hopeful than that of nature's time. Human beings are incapable of demonstrating progress in the march of time over successive generations. The observations of Qoheleth reveal that behaviour in one generation (9:2) does not guarantee any remembrance or lasting influence beyond this life. The passions of the heart (9:1) are in the possession of the divine rather than a catalyst for subsequent human use.

No one is able to penetrate the cloud of uncertainty that separates one individual from the succeeding time periods. Decisions made in an individual's present with a view to affecting events that will occur in the lifespan of future generations are fruitless as it becomes impossible to see how events will unfold. As readers are reminded on three occasions, no one is able to discover or predict what will transpire after them (3:22; 6:12; 7:14).

The only exception in Qoheleth's presentation of the opaqueness of generation time occurs in 7:11-12. *If* wisdom (the ability to act wisely in a given

situation) could be passed on to an heir, this would be advantageous for the one inheriting though not for the one bequeathing wisdom. Qoheleth has previously expressed concern in passing on wealth given that there is no guarantee that this wealth would be handled wisely (2:19). But if wisdom could be passed on to the next generation, that could be of value. It would not guarantee any lasting memory of the departed, however, and even if wisdom could be passed on, it would not change the fabric of God's universe (7:13). It does represent the one exception to the presentation of generation time, however small this exception may appear.

Lifespan Time

Lifespan time is that temporal level confined to the individual actions within the scope of one's days upon the earth through to the time of death. As Qoheleth's self-introduction has already intimated, the question of the value of one's life occupies a central place in Qoheleth's search: what is the value of life as a whole? The vast array of material provided in Ecclesiastes at the level of lifespan time is best dealt with in categories, and so we have arranged the material here according to themes: accumulation, enjoyment, death and progress.

Accumulation and Lifespan Time

Qoheleth describes in his introduction that the search for יִתְרוֹן has taken him in many directions including the acquisition of great amounts of wisdom and wealth. In four other locations within the first six chapters, Qoheleth considers the implications of spending one's lifespan time and energy on the accumulation of material goods highlighting both the positives and negatives of this quest.

We see the potential for a positive judgement of accumulation over a lifespan in Qoheleth's example of the man who is alone in 4:7-8. The proverbial material leading up to this example revolves around the value of work, and Qoheleth goes on to consider individuals who labour but who do not have others with whom to share the profits of labour. One of the challenges of this small section is the abrupt change of voice within v. 8. Commentators handle this change in three ways. Some take it as a direct quotation of the so-called "loner" who engages in a moment of self-reflection.⁴⁷ Others attribute the first person pronoun to Qoheleth himself either as

⁴⁷ Gordis, *Man and His World*, 242; Leupold, *Exposition of Ecclesiastes*, 109, and Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 98 also take this route, while Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 188 also thinks this is the best solution. This is often

Qoheleth's way of "demonstrating an identity with this person, or at least sympathy... the loner does not stop to ask this significant question, [so] Qohelet asks it for him", ⁴⁸ or as an autobiographical statement of Qoheleth breaking into the narrative. ⁴⁹ As difficult as the saying appears, the intrusion of the first person voice is best kept as Qoheleth either showing his empathy with the loner, or revealing that this hypothetical man is, in fact, Qoheleth himself.

The positive portrayal of lifespan time, which has not been observed in previous sections of Ecclesiastes, is expressed by what is not profitable. Three temporal markers come into play. First, the opening **וְשִׁבְתִּי אֲנִי וְאַרְאֶה** indicates that this observation of Qoheleth is an event. ⁵⁰ The second is **וְאֵין קֵץ לְכָל-עֲמָלוֹ** indicating that Qoheleth did not observe this individual once but observed the lifespan pattern of a man who spends considerable time working diligently. This is not an isolated event, but a series of events that have developed into a pattern for Qoheleth, which is clearly viewed as a negative judging by the statement "his eyes are not satisfied with riches." Third, Qoheleth mentions that there is no "son" or "brother" for the solitary individual referring to male relatives who, in this context, would be the recipients of the man's labour when he died. ⁵¹ This is the sliver of positive judgement on accumulation in lifespan time. Qoheleth here opens up the possibility that *if* one's lifespan labours resulted in benefit to a son or brother, it may not be **רַע וְעִנִּין רַע** (cf. 2:18-19). But in this case, the solitary individual does not

reflected in translations as well. The NJPSV takes the step of changing the text to third person, presumably for ease of reading, noting in a footnote that it is *literally* in the first person. The NRSV adds the *verbum dicendi*, "they ask," in keeping with its gender-neutral principle, while NEB and KJV utilize the third person singular. NAB omits the *verbum dicendi*, but adds quotation marks to give the impression of a quotation of the loner.

⁴⁸ So Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 110. Lohfink, *Qoheleth*, 71 follows this line as well.

⁴⁹ The reference, then, "shows that when he describes the workaholic loner he really has himself in mind" (Fox, *Ecclesiastes*, 29). See also Barton, *Ecclesiastes*, 115.

⁵⁰ See 4:1, in which the same introductory formula occurs and introduces the "event" of oppression and the lack of a comforter. Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 110 suggests this is "an example from daily observation," which fits into the event time view. Most commentators do not make sure of a time scale while discussing this verse.

⁵¹ The specific mention of these male relatives points to inheritance rather than someone to share in the produce of the man's labour. This is contra Graham S. Ogden, "The Mathematics of Wisdom: Qoheleth IV 1-12," *VT* 34 (1984): 451 who suggests that "in Qoheleth's perception, the reward for one's work has no abiding value unless it is something which can be shared with others. It is the community, however widely defined, which determines the ultimate worth of the material benefits one derives from work." In the case of v. 8, however, the community is limited to those who would inherit the fruit of one's labour rather than those with whom it can be shared.

work for this purpose. The solitary man works to accumulate without pause, refraining from the advantage of enjoyment in order to accumulate without the possibility of any lasting contribution as a result of his diligent labour.⁵² Nevertheless, it does leave open the possibility that labouring in order to become a benefactor may be useful occupation of one's lifespan time, but without it accumulation is of no lasting value.

Qoheleth addresses the "lover of money" in 5:9-10 suggesting that the one who loves money will never be satisfied with its accumulation. The rationale is provided by Qoheleth's experience in v. 10 that accumulation attracts consumers, and if the consumer is not the worker himself, it will be someone else. The sum balance of accumulation will be zero and net achievement will not be obtained.⁵³ The question "what gain" is reminiscent of the opening question of the book (1:3, cf. 3:9), which we identified as a lifespan question. Similarly, the question here is a lifespan question for which the only positive response is an event: כִּי אֵם רְאִיתָ עֵינֶיךָ . Both Fox⁵⁴ and Seow⁵⁵ defend this as a positive statement given that in other locations (11:9, 6:9) בָּרָאָה plus עֵינֶיךָ indicates a positive activity.⁵⁶ Similarly, by Qoheleth's own admission in 2:10, looking upon his own work was also a positive activity. The accumulator can appreciate the collection of wealth in the moment, but that is the sole advantage it brings. On the level of lifespan time it provides nothing real or lasting.

Following a brief foray into the relative merits of working and consuming in 5:11, Qoheleth turns his attention to another anecdote in 5:12-16 that has important lifespan time implications but which begins with a description of a number of events. Qoheleth characterizes the whole affair under the category of a "grievous evil."⁵⁷ At

⁵² We do not find convincing the explanation of Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 188, via the medieval commentator Rashbam, that this refers not to someone who lacks relatives but to one who has forsaken relatives for the sake of hoarding his wealth. This explanation is also followed by Leupold, *Exposition of Ecclesiastes*, 109.

⁵³ In this case, כִּשְׂרוֹן refers not to the process of work as was the case in 2:21 and 4:4 where כִּשְׂרוֹן was properly rendered as "skill." Here the result is at issue rather than the process, and so is rightly rendered as "success, profit." See Schoors, *Preacher, Part II*, 449.

⁵⁴ Fox, *Time to Tear Down*, 236.

⁵⁵ Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 220.

⁵⁶ Others, however, read it as a indication of the transitory nature of wealth. So Longman III, *Ecclesiastes*, 165: "the wealthy person has no pleasure in his riches except to see them pass through his hands (*admire it*)."

⁵⁷ So Schoors, *Preacher, Part II*, 254.

issue is the holding (שָׁמֹר) of riches. Two interpretive options are possible. Like Gordis who chooses “hoarded” for שָׁמֹר,⁵⁸ the riches could have been collected over a long period of time and then tragically lost (v. 13). This being the case, the לרעתו must be a foreshadowing of what transpires in v. 13 since it is difficult to see how storing/hoarding in itself results in harm. The better possibility is to see שָׁמֹר as indicating the holding of wealth from an opportunity to use it for one purpose (an event) only to use the wealth in another venture that results in loss (v. 13). In this case, the לרעתו indicates the loss of potential gain from the first opportunity resulting in the greater tragedy of losing all of the wealth in another, ultimately inferior, adventure. This warrants Qoheleth’s description of the whole circumstance as a “grievous evil.” This loss is followed by another event: the birth of a son that arrives into the empty hand of the father.⁵⁹ The birth of the son, which should be an occasion for joy, seems to Qoheleth as part and parcel of a series of negative events that overtake the unfortunate man.

The ongoing situation of the father continues through vv. 14-16. As we have already shown, there are difficulties associating vv. 14-16 with the father’s death. The same father is still in view, and Qoheleth tracks his progress from vv. 12-13. One must perform a substantial leap to move from the great misfortune of v. 13a, the birth of the son in v. 13b, and the matter of the man’s ultimate death in v. 14. Or rather, the leap appears to be marking vv. 12-13 as something Qoheleth observed, to a more philosophical observation about life and its futility without anything to mark the transition. Rather, there is greater cohesion viewing v. 14 as a continuing statement about what Qoheleth has seen with respect to the father than to propose a switch to a few philosophical musings about life. Those come, but toward the end of the section, and is clearly marked by the question מִהֲיִתְרוֹן.

In v. 14 Qoheleth continues to describe the father who, following the birth of his son, finds himself in a situation where he retains nothing of his previous fortune. It is to this existence devoid of possessions that he returns (יָשׁוּב).⁶⁰ Furthermore,

⁵⁸ Gordis, *Man and His World*, 168. Also Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 206.

⁵⁹ Lohfink, “Kohélet und die Banken” develops a lifespan time interpretation based on the whole anecdote being about financial loss. While we do not find the argument as a whole convincing, it does show the possibility of adopting a viable lifespan time approach.

⁶⁰ The same verbs occur in 1:7 (שָׁבִים לִלְכוֹת) with reference to a stream, and indicates a resumption or continuance of activity (“continue to flow”). Similarly, it occurs in 4:1,7 and 9:11 with the verb לָשׁוּב to indicate a further example of what Qoheleth has observed. It does occur in two contexts with

nothing he returns to yields any further profit (v. 14b). The ongoing future turns out to be continued loss. He emphasized this second state of affairs through the expression repeated from v. 12: וְגַם־זֶה רָעָה חוֹלָה (v. 15). This particular “grievous evil” is the continuing absence of success for “just as (בְּלִי־עֲמַת שׁ)⁶¹ he came, so shall he go.” This portrait of the man who loses everything and then continues on with nothing prompts the question, “what advantage is to him that he toils for the wind?” (v. 15b).

In this manner of reading the passage, the phrase כָּל־יָמָיו בַּחֲשָׁךְ יֹאכַל describes the father's mental state rather than a description of miserly living.⁶² This is further amplified by וְכַעַם הָרַבָּה וְחָלִי יוֹ וְקֶצֶף.⁶³ One initial misstep has brought ruin, and this ruin follows the father throughout the remainder of his lifespan. Some

reference to death (3:20 and 12:7), but it is combined in both instances with עָפָר (“dust”). It is possible, then, to read v. 14 without seeing in it a reference to death as many commentators have done. The point of comparison is not “birth and death” but with loss of possession, for which birth provides a suitable corollary given that one comes into the world with nothing. The reading of Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 123 suggests a reference to Job 1:21 wherein “[while it] seems to allude to the underworld using the euphemism “there” (*šāmāh*), Qohelet prefers the euphemism for dying “to go” (the verb *hālak*).” But this is not the only way of reading the verse. This requires the “grievous evil” to be the keeping of possessions (v. 12b) rather than the losing of possessions and the deprivation of the subsequent generation (v. 13). If the “grievous evil” is v. 12, then certainly v. 13 is superfluous information. The whole could be one philosophical debate about departing to the grave as one came rather than this pointed example coming from what Qoheleth has observed. Furthermore, the fact that “and nothing will he take away in his toil that he can carry away in his hand” (v. 15) is a truism rather than a meaningful statement about the man who lost his fortune, if it refers to death. The final verse of the anecdote, under the situation envisioned by Crenshaw and others, must refer to his stinginess so that he eats in the dark without spending the money for light. But if the man is so stingy, why does he not have anything to pass on to his son? Again, the only way to make sense of all these divergent statements is to suppose that the man was a failure, lost his fortune, and never recovered spending the rest of his days in gloom (חֲשָׁךְ) with “vexation and sickness and wrath” as a result of his poor decision to keep his riches rather than utilize them. This scenario accounts for all the information better than others.

⁶¹ Barton, *Ecclesiastes*, 132 defends Delitzsch's claim that בְּלִי־עֲמַת שׁ is an Aramaism imitating כָּל קֶבֶר דָּ of Dan 2:40. Schoors, *Preacher, Part II*, 146 details the subsequent modifications of this commonly held position noting that בְּלִי here is the combination of the prepositions לְ and כִּי, and it was likely the original form בְּלִי־עֲמַת שׁ. See Ginsberg, *Cohleth*, 353 who also took this position. It has been subsequently modified to show a structural similarity with the corresponding Aramaic expression.

⁶² Barton, *Ecclesiastes*, 128 describes it as “the self-denial and mental distresses of those who are bent upon the accumulation of wealth.” But following the birth of the son, the anecdote nowhere indicates the man attempted to accumulate more and more. The anecdote only indicates his loss, and not his continued greed. In this reading, the birth of the son is, again, superfluous. Whybray, *Ecclesiastes*, 101 rightly calls this miserly interpretation “improbable.”

⁶³ The difficulties with this expression are well known, and are often solved by adopting the noun כָּעַם rather than the verb, as do the Versions. The suffix on חָלִי יוֹ is often explained by dittography, or the contraction of חָלִי יוֹ לִי. See Schoors, *Preacher, Part II*, 241-42 for a summary of the possibilities.

encounter tragic circumstances brought about by their own ill-conceived decisions. Again, the anecdote raises the possibility that accumulation that results in an inheritance to children *may* be positive, but the pursuit of that goal is fraught with tragedy. A misstep may have ramifications that last through the course of one's lifespan.

The sixth chapter of Ecclesiastes begins with a familiar refrain: "There is an evil that I have seen under the sun."⁶⁴ Like 5:12, Qoheleth provides an object lesson through the circumstances of some individual. But there are two significant differences between the two anecdotes.⁶⁵ First, unlike the individual of 5:12-16, there is no material loss for the man described in 6:2. In fact, this individual acquires and possesses great wealth and honour but is not permitted by God "to enjoy" these things.⁶⁶ Second, the temporal setting of the two anecdotes is very different. In the first, Qoheleth recalls a series of past events such as missed opportunity, financial loss, and the birth of a son, which are combined with an ongoing (futural) present (returning to a dark existence). In the present anecdote, Qoheleth assumes a robust past given that the individual has acquired wealth, possessions, and honour, but notes that the event of enjoyment never took place, and then speaks of the ongoing (futural) present. The whole anecdote is an extrapolation from the individual who has, but does not enjoy, to the stranger enjoying his acquisitions.⁶⁷ Accumulation

⁶⁴ Not surprisingly, some 20 manuscripts add חולָה following רעה, as in 5:12.

⁶⁵ One should note that while we are observing two anecdotes, there is much greater similarity between the phrasing of 5:18, which is a more general statement about life (כָּל־הָאָדָם), and 6:2. Isaksson, *Studies in Qoheleth*, 120-23 looks specifically at the use of the verb נָתַן (נָתַן in 5:18 and נָתַן in 6:2), and concludes that 6:2 refers to "cases when God gives a man wealth..." rather than "a single case, or possibly, several single cases." He does not, however, comment on the similarities between 5:13 and 6:2. In both cases, Qoheleth references his observation (רָאִיתִי). Given that 5:13-16 appears to be a specific individual, it is likely the אִישׁ in 6:2 is also a specific individual. The difference between the use of the suffix conjugation and the prefix conjugation is both in the fact that the אִישׁ of 6:2 stands in contradistinction from the כָּל־הָאָדָם of 5:18 (so Isaksson) and the fact that the situation Qoheleth describes is not wholly past (5:12-13), but is in an ongoing state (cf. 5:14-16).

⁶⁶ The word translated "to enjoy" is the infinitive construct לֵאכֹל and likely is meant to bring back the notion of לֵאכֹל וּלְשִׁתּוֹת וּלְרֵאוֹת טוֹבָה בְּכָל־עֲמָלוֹ found in 5:17 and elsewhere. The concept is metaphorical and goes beyond merely the "consuming" of resources for sustenance toward the use of resources for pleasure and enjoyment. See Schoors, *Preacher, Part II*, 185.

⁶⁷ The identity of the stranger is not clarified. As commentators have noted, נָכְרִי often refers to "foreigners" but in this case is someone who is not a legitimate son or heir. While in many of the commentaries surveyed, the writer does not make a distinction between whether the stranger enjoys the wealth of the gifted man during or following his lifetime, there are exceptions. Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 125 speaks of the tax system of the Ptolomies in Judea whereby the property is not lost to the stranger but taxed heavily. On the other hand, Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 210 notes that the surrounding context puts the emphasis on heirs and succession.

coupled with loss is tragic. Accumulation without enjoyment is also tragic, and may be even worse.⁶⁸ Qoheleth's presentation of lifespan time as a means of accumulation is wholly negative. What is presented as positive, however, is lifespan time that allows for enjoyment. It is to the theme of enjoyment we now turn.

Enjoyment and Lifespan Time

Following the account of the tragic man that we saw above (5:12-16), Qoheleth expresses what he has found to be good (v. 17): enjoyment. Enjoyment itself is at the level of event time as it contains the acts of eating, drinking and seeing the goodness in one's hard work.⁶⁹ However, in this instance Qoheleth connects enjoyment positively to lifespan time by the expression **יְמֵי־חַיֵּי**. The foundations of eating, drinking, and seeing goodness in one's efforts should be iterative throughout the number of days given by God to live under the sun. The successful life is the one marked by the ability to eat, drink, and find reward in the act of toil itself rather than in the product of toil.

Together vv. 17-18 form a temporal chiasmic structure. Verse 17 moves from event time to lifespan time, while v. 18 begins with a lifespan idea and moves to event time:

אֲשֶׁר־יִפֶּה לֵאכֹל וְלִשְׁתּוֹת וּלְרֹאוֹת טוֹבָה בְּכָל־עֲמָלוֹ שִׂיעֵמַל
תַּחַת־הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ

it is fitting to eat and to drink and to see goodness in all one's toil with
which one toils under the sun

מִסְפַּר יְמֵי־חַיָּו אֲשֶׁר־נָתַן־לּוֹ הָאֱלֹהִים כִּי־הוּא חֶלְקוֹ:

the number of days of one's life God gives; for this is one's portion.

גַּם כָּל־הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר נָתַן־לּוֹ הָאֱלֹהִים עֹשֶׁר וְנַכְסִים

Also everyone to whom God gives riches and wealth

וְהַשְׁלִימוֹ לֵאכֹל מִמֶּנּוּ וּלְשַׂאת אֶת־חֶלְקוֹ וּלְשִׂמְחָה בְּעֲמָלוֹ זֶה מַתָּת
אֱלֹהִים הִיא:

and he grants him to eat from it, and to lift up one's portion and to
rejoice in one's toil—this is the gift of God.

⁶⁸ Fox, *Ecclesiastes*, 38 states that 6:1-6 “describes an even worse scenario than the two related earlier.”

⁶⁹ Schoors, *Preacher, Part II*, 37 argues that given the similarities in context, there is no need to posit a difference between the use of the feminine **טוֹבָה** here and the masculine **טוֹב** in 2:1 and 3:13.

Here one sees a picture of a life that meets Qoheleth's approval.

The positive estimation of lifespan time that contains entertainment in vv. 17-18 undergoes a monumental transformation in the light of v. 19. One can positively experience lifespan time *only if* one is blessed not to reflect upon it. The verb זָכַר does not refer exclusively to past events but refers, rather, to life as a whole.⁷⁰ There are significant temporal implications at this point. Fox focuses on the content of זָכַר rather than any temporal aspect, suggesting that it means "either to be aware of their unhappiness or to recall their brevity."⁷¹ Brown is acutely aware of the temporal aspects, however, and picks up on the use of "brood" in the NRSV to suggest that "to brood" suggests "a wallowing in nostalgia and, perhaps, a desperate longing for some sweet hereafter."⁷² Our analysis thus far would indicate a preference for seeing in the use of זָכַר a lament over temporality rather than content.⁷³ To זָכַר אֶת יְמֵי חַיָּיו would imply an attempt to look beyond the immediacy of event time to see how events connect to form something larger or better. This exhortation to refuse reflection upon the connections between events flows from the inability of Qoheleth to accomplish this himself either through reflection on his own experiences (Eccl 2) or on the experiences of others.

There is certainly a connection between 6:2 and 3 based on subject matter, but it is also clear that the referent has been expanded.⁷⁴ Here אִם introduces a series of conditional phrases in the protasis that finds its apodosis in the final clause אָמַרְתִּי טוֹב מִמֶּנּוּ הַנֶּפֶל.⁷⁵ Qoheleth has abandoned, or perhaps better, expanded,

⁷⁰ Schoors, *Preacher, Part II*, 321. Pieter Arie Hendrik de Boer, *Gedenken und Gedächtnis in der Welt des Alten Testaments*, Franz Delitzsch-Vorlesungen 1960 (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1962), 63 holds that the root itself suggests "nennen" rather than *gedenken*. He goes on that "Wenn wir die Übersetzung 'gedenken' benutzen, sollten wir nie vergessen, dass man gedenkt, nicht um die Vergangenheit zu konservieren, sondern um in der Gegenwart zu bestehen." TDOT, s.v. זָכַר, II, 1 suggests "recollection" is a better rendering than "recall" for it "springs from intellectual activity with reference to the past."

⁷¹ Fox, *Ecclesiastes*, 38.

⁷² Brown, *Ecclesiastes*, 63.

⁷³ This is contra Lohfink, "Qoheleth 5:17-19," who suggests that Qoheleth's project is to reflect on the shortness of life. The act of not remembering is to take the focus off the immediacy of death. But as we have developed here, Qoheleth's difficulty is not with the brevity of life but that life's events do not lead anywhere in lifespan time. After all, Qoheleth addresses long life in 6:3 and 6 and finds that length of life is not valuable outside of enjoyment, since neither long lives nor short lives result in perpetual advantage.

⁷⁴ Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 126.

⁷⁵ Fox, *Time to Tear Down*, 243. Gordis, *Man and His World*, 258, however, suggests that אִם only governs the first two clauses while וְרַב שְׁיֵהִיוּ יְמֵי־שְׁנָיו is concessive "However many the days of

what he has experienced first-hand to talk about the potential superman who has both heirs and long life, clearly in the realm of lifespan time. Even these two seemingly important benefits are worthless if the conditions of satisfaction and burial are not met. The failure to be satiated (נפשו לא תשבע) certainly implies events, but set over such a span that the individual can declare, “life was good.” A life devoid of pleasure is, for Qoheleth, a tragic life.

As we follow Qoheleth's line of thought further, vv. 4-6 provide a set of temporal expressions that challenge the simple time equations used so far in this study. If we read vv. 4-5 as referring to the stillbirth rather than the man,⁷⁶ then we have a description of the lifespan time of the stillborn. The stillborn comes בהבל and departs in darkness.⁷⁷ The duration of the lifespan of the stillbirth is negligible from an adult's temporal scheme for it never even had a chance to see the sun, and yet it would be improper given the comparison with the man who has so much in v. 3 to refer to this as an event. Similarly, v. 6 refers to the theoretical lifespan of the person who lived “a thousand years twice over.” Clearly this is much longer than the usual course of life and yet the exaggeration still only encompasses one individual's existence. Thus, while the temporal content is different than other places in which we have used the term lifespan time, the sense of one individual's span of life is maintained.

This reveals that the length of lifespan time is not at issue for Qoheleth. A long life is not necessarily superior to a short life, and may in fact be inferior if that long life lacks satisfaction. It is the possibility of satisfaction in life that defines superiority. This provides the rationale for Qoheleth's exhortation to youth in 11:9-12:7. The lifespan of youth is set in contrast to the long duration of the days of sorrow. Qoheleth idealizes youth as a period when the potential for enjoyment is great, and this enjoyment is not to be sacrificed for empty dreams of some future

his years may be.” Gordis, however, then reinserts the conditional “if” for the next phrase “if he derives no pleasure from his wealth” (170) without additional comment.

⁷⁶ Fox, *Time to Tear Down*, 241 suggests that while the referent is ambiguous, v. 4 reads better when it refers to the man rather than the stillbirth. Fox's position reads against the majority and is not generally followed. See the evaluation of Schoors, *Preacher, Part II*, 126.

⁷⁷ With בהבל possibly meaning either “it comes without meaning” (so Longman III, *Ecclesiastes*, 171) or “kommt als Nichtigkeit” (“it comes as a nothing”) as Ernst Jenni, *Die hebräischen Präpositionen*, 1: *Die Präposition Beth* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1992), 83.

glory. Rather, the days that lay ahead may be as dark as a funeral march. Enjoyment in lifespan time is the highest good for the individual.

Enjoyment is not only a function of individualism but also of relationship as Eccl 9:9 implies. Qoheleth's imperative **חַיִּים עִם-אִשָּׁה** exhorts pleasurable experience of life with a woman in the context of "all the days of **הַבְּלִי**."⁷⁸ Here **חַיִּים** has the sense of "enjoyment" and the use of the singular **אִשָּׁה** without the definite article points us away from regarding **אִשָּׁה** specifically as "wife/spouse," but rather "a woman," whomever this may be.⁷⁹ We would submit that enjoyment is, by its very nature, limited and situational. So the use of **כָּל-יְמֵי חַיֵּי הַבְּלִי**, as in 6:12, is an expression of lifespan time, but it presumes iterative experiences of enjoyment over a course of time.

Qoheleth's connection between enjoyment and lifespan time depends to a large extent on the frequency of pleasurable experiences. Qoheleth does not imply that every experience must be pleasurable, or even that the majority of experiences must be so. Rather, that enjoyment must be of sufficient frequency that its overall effect acts as a distraction from the search for higher or greater meaning at the level of lifespan, generation, or nature's time.

Lifespan Time in the Shadow of Death

The necessity of enjoyment as a part of the good life should not, however, overshadow the stark realities of life available to any reflective person. In fact, Qoheleth advocates a lifespan lived under the reality of death.

On the surface, 9:4 offers a positive assessment of lifespan time with its suggestion that living is superior to its alternative. The fascinating contrast between the living dog, which was a loathsome organism used as an expression for a male prostitute in Deut 23:19,⁸⁰ and the proud and stately lion is used solely to illustrate that regardless of one's status in life, living offers the advantage of knowing that

⁷⁸ See Schoors, *Preacher, Part II*, 61-62 for the discussion of **חַיִּים** in this context. Qoheleth uses **חַיִּים** with reference to experiencing the good (3:13; 5:17) and the bad (4:3).

⁷⁹ So Jean-Jacques Lavoie, "Bonheur et finitude humaine: Étude de Qo 9,7-10," *ScEs* 45 (1993): 320 and Fox, *Time to Tear Down*, 294, though Fox admits "Still, it is hard to see what Qoheleth could have in mind besides marriage." The question as to whether **חַיִּים עִם-אִשָּׁה** is sexual in nature remains outstanding.

⁸⁰ Fox, *Ecclesiastes*, 62 mentions that the dog was "an object of contempt in ancient Israel."

death is coming. We have already commented how 9:5-6 comments negatively on generation time since nothing of the individual survives death. But leading up to this is a positive reckoning of lifespan time in the sense that one is able to live in the shadow of one's own mortality. The use of בַּמָּחֹן is often translated as "hope,"⁸¹ but this term surely has more to do with seeing something as "certain" rather than positive.⁸² The positive feature of lifespan time is in comparison to generation time, which offers no certainties, rather than a positive evaluation in and of itself.

Living in the shadow of death also features in 7:1-2. The seventh chapter begins with a collection of aphorisms similar to those in Proverbs.⁸³ The connections between proverbs are loosely based on keywords and subject matter rather than a clear progression.⁸⁴ A word-play begins the first proverb (טוֹב שֵׁם מִשְׁמָן טוֹב), whose theme bears some similarity to Prov 22:1. Lavoie picks up on the similarity and proposes that in both cases שֵׁם can be translated by the sense of *renommée* ("fame"). Lavoie links this to Gen 6:4⁸⁵ and Isa 56:5⁸⁶ and suggests, "La renommée dont il est question est vraisemblablement la renommée posthume, laquelle se réalisait efficacement par une descendance nombreuse."⁸⁷ The difficulty with posthumous fame is, as Lavoie fully admits, that Qoheleth has not previously held to the ongoing remembrance of those who have gone before (cf. 1:11; 2:16). But for Lavoie, שֵׁם should arouse visions of death so that the parallel in v. 1 is between death (שָׁם) and life (שָׁמַיִן), death (יְוֹם הַמּוֹת) and life (יְוֹם הַחַיִּים).⁸⁸ He proposes a contrast in the viewpoints of the two halves. The first is a conventional proverb suggesting that one's posthumous reputation is of greater value than celebratory

⁸¹ So, for example, Bartholomew, *Ecclesiastes*, 297 and Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 170.

⁸² As suggested by Fox, *Time to Tear Down*, 292 and Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 300.

⁸³ Jean-Jacques Lavoie, "La philosophie comme réflexion sur la mort," *LTP* 54 (1998): 91. Lavoie proposes that the macro-structure of this section is 6:10-7:12 with 7:1-4 forming a tight micro-structure within larger unit.

⁸⁴ Ogden, *Qoheleth*, 108. Fox, *Time to Tear Down*, 250 comments, "The unit is loose-knit and coheres largely because there is no clear subdivision." That this loose connection by keyword and verbal/literal links is also a feature of aphorism collections in Proverbs, see chapter 2 of Stuart Weeks, *Early Israelite Wisdom*, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993).

⁸⁵ אֲנָשֵׁי הַשֵּׁם "warriors of renown."

⁸⁶ נָתַתִּי יָד וְשֵׁם "I will give... a monument and a name."

⁸⁷ So Lavoie, "La philosophie comme réflexion sur la mort," 99.

⁸⁸ Lavoie, "La philosophie comme réflexion sur la mort," 101 who states "Qo 7,1 présente deux proverbes qui préfèrent la mort à la vie, mais qui n'ont pas la même perception de la mort et de la vie."

living. The second proverb is less conventional and simply looks at death as preferable to life.

Strictly speaking, the posthumous reputation is not necessary either by vocabulary or sense. A survey of the uses of שָׁמַיִם in the Hebrew Bible suggests that the majority are not used as posthumous reputation but as the association of an individual with some event that defines him or her even during the course of life.⁸⁹ Those examples that specifically speak of posthumous reputation are often directly marked with some reference to death.⁹⁰ The general tenor of Ecclesiastes also makes posthumous fame less likely.

A good reputation provides value on a number of different levels such as the possibility for companionship and financial opportunities. It is unlikely that Qoheleth would deny the benefit of being associated with some positive event (שָׁמַיִם) though the long-term benefit of such association is open to question (cf. 9:13-15). A good name has value for life beyond mere celebration (שָׁמַיִם טוֹב).⁹¹ The significance of the parallel in 7:1b lies in the fact that, given life's uncertainty, completing life is better than starting out. The preference for the day of death is hardly surprising considering previous statements about the goodness of death in light of oppression (4:1-3). If one is fortunate enough to have gained a good name in life, the day of death represents the end of one's ability to destroy it. The day of birth is the start of a long journey going nowhere in particular, and therefore would be a distressing concept for Qoheleth. Lifespan time is lived out in the shadow of one's own demise.

⁸⁹ See, for example, Gen 11:4; 12:2; Deut 22:14,19; 26:19; 2 Sam 7:9,23; 23:18; Isa 63:12; Jer 32:20; Ezek 16:14-15; 22:5; Zeph 3:19; Prov 22:1; Eccl 7:1; Neh 6:13; 9:10; 2 Chr 26:8.

⁹⁰ Those examples that HALOT lists as having explicit mention of posthumous reputation are 2 Sam 14:7; Isa 14:22; 56:5; 66:22; Job 18:17; Prov 10:7.

⁹¹ While others have proposed seeing שָׁמַיִם as associated with either birthing or death rituals, and that either of these figures would be appropriate to the context, Lavoie, "La philosophie comme réflexion sur la mort," 100 contends that "aucune référence vétérotestamentaire n'est jamais donnée à l'appui de ces deux interprétations." For Lavoie, the use of oil is for celebration so that, for instance, the lack of oil is a sign of bereavement (2 Sam 14:2 and Isa 61:3). Still other commentators have taken שָׁמַיִם טוֹב as synonymous with "great riches" in Prov 22:1. While this is certainly possible, oil is hardly an overt symbol of wealth in Ecclesiastes or the Hebrew Bible in general. The mention of שָׁמַיִם הַטוֹב in the treasury of Hezekiah (2 Kgs 20:13) shows that "precious oil" was among the treasures of the elite, but there it is found among many other overt symbols of wealth. That it should alone stand as a symbol of great wealth is unlikely.

This is further emphasized in 7:2 where Qoheleth expresses a preference for a “house of mourning” over a “house of feasting.” Bartholemew sees here a contradiction to the enjoyment passages that recommend eating and drinking.⁹² The contradiction, however, occurs at the level of event time as attending to a house of mourning and celebration are mutually exclusive. At the level of lifespan time as a movement toward death, however, Qoheleth is entirely consistent. Qoheleth has already advocated that life should be viewed in terms of a limited existence that has no lasting significance. The house of mourning as the “end of all people” is a reminder of this limitation,⁹³ and certainly does not preclude enjoyment as long as it is lived out in the shadow of the stark reality that human existence does not result in real progress.

Lifespan Time and Progress

A number of Qoheleth's questions from his self-introduction address the theme of progress including his “What does [joy] do?” (2:1), “why have I been wise?” (2:15), and “What has the man for all his toil?” (2:22). Qoheleth searches for the reward that motivates action, and glimpses of Qoheleth's further reflections on progress appear throughout his musings.

Qoheleth turns to the question of *יִתְרוֹן* in 3:9: if people do all these things (3:2-8), what *יִתְרוֹן* does the worker receive in light of so much activity? The tone of the work thus far brings the expectation that the answer to the question will be negative (“nothing”). The use of the singular participle *הַעוֹשֶׂה* and the singular noun *עֹמֵל* suggests that the scope of the inquiry is how an individual worker benefits from his/her effort. The use of *יִתְרוֹן* in 3:9 is very close to that of the frame-narrator's question of 1:3 (generation time) and 2:11 (lifespan time) where Qoheleth evaluates the body of work that he has accomplished over his own lifespan.⁹⁴

Qoheleth moves in v. 10 to consider the *עֲנִי* of human beings. In its previous use in 1:13, we suggested it revealed the lifespan search of Qoheleth. But

⁹² Bartholemew, *Ecclesiastes*, 247. See also Fox, *Ecclesiastes*, 44.

⁹³ Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 135 has already noticed this pattern in 7:1-12 whereby “present behavior is determined by future expectations.” He suggests, however, that vv. 13-14 offer a corrective of this position by advocating living life in the present. As we shall see further on, this is not the case and event time is again seen in light of greater stretches of time.

⁹⁴ Though the question is phrased differently without the preposition *ל*, as in 1:3. In the opinion of Bartholemew, *Ecclesiastes*, 165, it is the same “programmatic question.”

the referent in 3:10 is different than in 1:13, and we must not simply superimpose one use upon the other. Previously, ענין was specifically designated as an “evil business” (ענין רע). Longman has suggested that this same designation should be understood when we encounter ענין in 3:10 as well.⁹⁵ But there is a considerable difference to how the lexeme is used in the two contexts. In 1:13 it specifically refers to the search to which Qoheleth “gave his heart to seek and to spy out by wisdom all that is being done under heaven.” This, Qoheleth declares, is an ענין רע for anyone who would undertake it as he has.⁹⁶ That is, the act of investigation is רע rather than the activity of human beings. In 3:10, however, ענין refers specifically to some aspect of human activity, which Qoheleth has observed.⁹⁷ The task is nothing other than “sensing the eternal and toiling with life’s contingencies.”⁹⁸ But does this struggle result in progress?

The whole of the argument in Eccl 3 supposes the answer “no,” but this comes to the forefront in Qoheleth’s second self-reflection beginning in v. 18 (אמרתי אני בלבי). In vv. 18-21, Qoheleth questions the distinction between the fate (מקרה) of individual human beings and beasts. Perhaps there is some reference here to the narrative of Gen 2,⁹⁹ but also any tradition (Gen 1, Ps 8) that places human beings in a different category from the other נפש חיה. Qoheleth lacks evidence that the lifespan time of human beings is quantitatively different than that of beasts since both die in the same way, both return to the dust, and neither makes any lasting impact upon the earth. Qoheleth pronounces this as הבל revealing his

⁹⁵ Longman III, *Ecclesiastes*, 118. He notes that there are a few similarities with 1:13 and “the main difference is that the *task* there is explicitly designated as *evil*. The context here, however, makes it plain that the negative connotation is still present.”

⁹⁶ Lavoie, “Activité, sagesse et finitude,” 102 notes two possible views on הוּא in 1:13. Either it refers to “all that is being done under heaven,” or it refers specifically to the acts of trying to “seek and to spy out by wisdom.” We follow Lavoie in preferring the second for even in 1:17 הוּא has a function parallel to הוּא referring to the verbal idea of וְשִׁכַּח וְדָעַת הוּלָלוּת וְשִׁכַּח וְדָעַת (“to know wisdom and to know madness and folly”). Lavoie notes that ענין “est bel et bien employé en lien avec les activités intellectuelles.” Fox, *Time to Tear Down*, 171 marks it as a parenthetical phrase with little connection to the preceding since הוּא cannot refer to הַשָּׁמַיִם because it is not “given” to man. He does not appear to consider that it could refer to the broader idea of Qoheleth’s search.

⁹⁷ The other occurrences of ענין either have a neutral orientation (“busy-ness”/effort), or are specifically designated as “evil,” “painful,” etc. See Eccl 1:13; 2:23, 26; 3:10; 4:8; 5:2, 13; 8:16. It is qualified by “evil” in 1:13, 4:8 and 5:13.

⁹⁸ Brown, *Ecclesiastes*, 44.

⁹⁹ Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 92.

negative judgement upon the fiction of progress in lifespan time.¹⁰⁰ The movement toward the consideration of humans and beasts arises from the consideration of the righteous and wicked in vv. 16-17, which overall suggests that Qoheleth disowns any thought of progress or profitability in lifespan time on the basis of righteousness. The system Qoheleth sees in place, coming from the hand of God, does not make this possible.

Righteousness is also in view throughout the lifespan observations of 7:15-20. Qoheleth begins the unit by drawing upon a lifespan observation of his own (רִאִיִּי בִימֵי הַבָּל).¹⁰¹ His consideration of the relative lifespans of the צַדִּיק and רָשָׁע and whether these are awarded length of life (מֵאֲרִיךְ) or early death (אָבַד) results in no clear relationship between action and longevity. Bartholomew would suggest that “Qoheleth has found living examples that clearly contradict Proverbs' character-consequence teaching,” but this is to over-simplify the situation.¹⁰² Proverbial material encapsulates what is generally observable, and does not provide binding universal rules but only norms.¹⁰³ Qoheleth here is noting an exception to the expectation. The norm Qoheleth expects is that the righteous live long and the wicked have truncated lives.¹⁰⁴ But the existence of exceptions necessitates the avoidance of “rules” when it comes to moral living. One cannot expect that participating in a suitable action in a given moment will have any overall affect, which we are terming progress, at the level of lifespan time.

This leads naturally to the advice of v. 16 אַל־תִּהְיֶה צַדִּיק. The two most frequent explanations for vv. 16-18 suggest that Qoheleth is either remarking on some unreal circumstance where the Hithpael form of חָכַם refers to the pretence of

¹⁰⁰ Contra Fox, *Time to Tear Down*, 214 and Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 80 who see הַבָּל as a reference solely to “human and beast” and הָבַל as a reference to their brevity/absurdity. That would require a very different reading of the phrase, which in similar looking circumstances has characterized “everything.” See Longman III, *Ecclesiastes*, 126 and Schoors, *Preacher, Part II*, 3 who prefer “everything is meaningless.”

¹⁰¹ The reference to “מִי הַבָּל” is a quality statement rather than a statement of length. Contra Barton, *Ecclesiastes*, 143, and Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 140.

¹⁰² Bartholomew, *Ecclesiastes*, 255. See also Bartholomew, *Reading Ecclesiastes*, 254-57 where he has a more nuanced stance on the relationship between Ecclesiastes and Proverbs.

¹⁰³ Perhaps it is fair to say that the violation is of the deuteronomic idea, as Ogden, *Qoheleth*, 122.

¹⁰⁴ Ogden, *Qoheleth*, 123 suggests, “Qoheleth has reminded his readers that the righteous often fall prey to an early death.” Qoheleth does not indicate, however, that this is a frequent occurrence, but only that he has seen it and thus no generally established rule is possible for the results of righteousness and wickedness.

being wise,¹⁰⁵ or that Qoheleth here advises a degree of moderation in both righteousness and wickedness.¹⁰⁶ Given the rightful criticism of Whybray's position,¹⁰⁷ the second position is preferred. Longman, who follows the general line of the second position, imagines a "why bother?" response to both righteousness and folly, since neither guarantee the desires of human aspiration, such as prosperity.¹⁰⁸ Here Longman is quite right, though he only focuses on Qoheleth's argument at the level of lifespan time. Qoheleth is not, however, apathetic to wisdom's claim. While verse 19 ("Wisdom gives more strength to the wise than ten rulers who are in a city") does appear to stand apart from its context, its presence does mollify what appears to be the irreverent tone of vv. 16-18.¹⁰⁹ Qoheleth does not outright deny a benefit to wisdom in its entirety. Rather, in light of v. 15, Qoheleth questions the lifespan benefit to wisdom, which in certain circles comes to be associated with long life.¹¹⁰ The disjunction between individual events and the larger whole of life is thrown in to doubt by Qoheleth's temporal rhetoric. All the actions in vv. 16-18 occur at the level of event time, while v. 15 directs itself at the level of lifespan time.

The sentiment of v. 20 operates at the same level as other passages that advise against looking back (e.g., 7:10, 2:11). Striving for perfection as a means of progress is an unobtainable goal for Qoheleth. But since progress is not possible at the level of lifespan time anyway, one need not view errors as fatal.

Following the event time advice regarding gossip in vv. 21-22, Qoheleth returns in vv. 23-29 to lifespan reflections on his pursuit of wisdom. The referent of כל־זה is ambiguous being either what has preceded or what follows.¹¹¹ In either

¹⁰⁵ So Whybray, *Ecclesiastes*, 120 and Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 141 who follows Whybray. By comparison, the parallel must be the pretence of being righteous.

¹⁰⁶ So Bartholomew, *Ecclesiastes*, 256-57 and Fox, *Time to Tear Down*, 259-60 among others. See the summary of positions in Wayne A. Brindle, "Righteousness and Wickedness in Ecclesiastes 7:15-18," *AUSS* 23 (1985): 243-57.

¹⁰⁷ See, for example, Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 253.

¹⁰⁸ Longman III, *Ecclesiastes*, 196.

¹⁰⁹ The suggestion that the verse has been moved (so Fox, *Time to Tear Down*, 256) has no textual evidence to support it. Moderating the tone of vv. 16-18 is enough of a purpose whether it is directly connected to the previous verses or not.

¹¹⁰ See, for example, Prov 3:16. Leo G. Perdue, *Proverbs*, Int (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 102 notes that "Long life (Prov. 3:2; 22:14), riches (Prov. 14:24), and honor (Prov. 8:8) are among the greatest values in wisdom literature (1 Kings 3:1-15)."

¹¹¹ Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 259 suggests this may be intentional.

case, Qoheleth confesses his failure to obtain this state of being wise. This failure to “be wise” is different from acting according to wisdom, for Qoheleth has previously declared that he obtained more wisdom than any other king over Jerusalem (1:16). But perhaps there is a subtle difference between the collection of wisdom and the designation of being wise in the sense of “the true understanding of reality”¹¹² where wise action and progress intersect. We suggest that temporality is at the heart of Qoheleth’s frustration. He can observe the world, but he cannot fit the pieces together into a pattern that provides advantage on the level of lifespan or generation time. All that remains are events, disjointed and isolated. He has learned how to act in event time (with wisdom) but has failed to become wise as a means of achieving something greater. We can compare this with 8:17 where Qoheleth explicitly states that even the wise cannot know the future.

Isaksson, in agreement with the majority of commentators, suggests that the expression *מה־שהיה* refers to the present circumstances of what is happening now.¹¹³ He stands in agreement with Barton, who suggests that the expression refers “to the true inwardness of things, the reality below all changing phenomena.”¹¹⁴ But the present is the constant present as both in v. 23 and in v. 25 Qoheleth speaks of what has started in the past tense: “I tested,” “I and my heart turned to know.” Qoheleth’s search for the meaningful whole is a lifetime search, and it has failed.

The sayings concerning *אִתְּהָאֵשׁ* in vv. 26-28 are difficult indeed, and have attracted many proposals.¹¹⁵ What is valuable for our purposes is that temporally the

¹¹² So Michael V. Fox and Bezael Porten, “Unsought Discoveries: Qoheleth 7:23-8:1a,” *HS* 19 (1978): 28.

¹¹³ Isaksson, *Studies in Qoheleth*, 90. The other three occurrences of *מה־שהיה* are generally translated as present tense. Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 144 is one of the few to see this as a reference to past events. He suggests that these are events of the distant past, and would perhaps best refer to generation time. This is also a possibility, though we think it more likely Qoheleth is trying to understand the events within his own lifespan given the overall context of 7:15-29, rather than the events of history.

¹¹⁴ Barton, *Ecclesiastes*, 146.

¹¹⁵ Ludger Schwienhorst-Schönberger, “‘Bitterer als der Tod ist die Frau’ (Kol 7,26): zum Argumentationsgang von Koh 7,25-29,” in *Textarbeit: Studien zu Texten und ihrer Rezeption aus dem Alten Testament und der Umwelt israels*, ed. Klaus Kiesow and Thomas Meurer, AOAT 294 (Ugarit-Verlag: Münster, 2003), 443-55 has provided a helpful summary of previous solutions. He suggests commentators generally fall into four categories to explain these verses: 1) general misogynist sayings reflecting the opinion of Qoheleth; 2) partial misogynist sayings reflecting the opinion of Qoheleth toward the seductive woman; 3) metaphorical sayings that describe the opinion of Qoheleth either toward Lady Wisdom or Dame Folly; 4) general misogynist sayings that Qoheleth quotes from another source. Schwienhorst-Schönberger’s own position is a further development of the quotation theory.

statements encompass the whole of Qoheleth's search (lifespan) and are decidedly negative due to the failure of his search. The exception is v. 29 where Qoheleth presents a positive, though backhanded, observation. Much in v. 29 depends on the senses of *יָשָׁר* and *עֲשֵׂה הָאֱלֹהִים*. Is *יָשָׁר* a moral term contrasted to an equally moral term *חֲשַׁבְנוּת*,¹¹⁶ or is it an intellectual term contrasted with the intellectual sense of *חֲשַׁבְנוּת*? Longman, who favors the moral sense of both *יָשָׁר* and *חֲשַׁבְנוּת* suggests that the reference to the action of God is an obvious connection to creation.¹¹⁷ The obviousness is lost on Fox, who suggests the act of God here is related to the birth of every human being.¹¹⁸ There are instances where allusions to the creation account are possible (cf. 3:11), though none of them can be considered obvious. Little in Qoheleth's self-disclosure pertains to the time of creation, and it is tempting given the lack of clear connection to understand this verse apart from this allusion. It is as easily understood as a general statement about Qoheleth's observations than a reference to the deep past. That is, at their core human beings have a simple and straightforward intellect.¹¹⁹ This fits well with the simple pleasures of enjoyment that Qoheleth advocates throughout. The difficulty from Qoheleth's perspective is that humans are not content with simple but gravitate, even as he has done, toward the complex and this to their own frustration. There is a certain element of self-deprecation in Qoheleth's statement, since he himself has engaged in this *חֲשַׁבְנוּת רַבִּים*.¹²⁰

The anecdote concerning the foolish king and the wise youth also calls into question the notion of progress. As Wright has skilfully noticed, the anecdote follows a number of positive expressions regarding companionship (the "second" of 4:8 and 10).¹²¹ There are certainly difficulties in the reading of this section,¹²² but

¹¹⁶ The only other use of this term in the Hebrew Bible refers to the war machinery of 2 Chr 26:15, but Schoors, *Preacher, Part II*, 446 notes that its use here is likely related to the root's use in the sense of "to contrive evil, ruin."

¹¹⁷ Longman III, *Ecclesiastes*, 143.

¹¹⁸ Fox, *Ecclesiastes*, 53. Ogden, *Qoheleth*, 134 agrees, while most other commentators are decidedly ambiguous about its relation to creation with the exceptions of Barton, *Ecclesiastes*, 147, who holds v. 29 to be a gloss, and Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 149.

¹¹⁹ Taking *יָשָׁר* and *חֲשַׁבְנוּת* as intellectual terms as in Fox and Porten, "Unsought Discoveries," 32.

¹²⁰ Bartholomew, *Ecclesiastes*, 269 following Fox and Porten, "Unsought Discoveries," 33-34.

¹²¹ Addison G. Wright, "The Poor But Wise Youth and the Old But Foolish King," in *Wisdom, You Are My Sister: Studies in Honor of Roland E. Murphy, O.Carm., on the Occasion of His Eightieth Birthday*, ed. Michael L. Barré, CBQMS 29 (Washington, DC: The Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1997), 151.

Wright's careful reading and comparison of positions has provided a helpful way through. In his opinion, there are only two characters in the account: the old king who made a great name for himself, and his companion (the second)¹²³ who, owing to his wisdom, became the preferred ruler to the old and foolish king by the people.¹²⁴ The anecdote as a whole, then, is meant to be an alternative to the benefits of companionship developed in 4:7-12. While Wright's analysis has much to commend it, he fails to account for the final phrase of v. 16: "For also this is absurd and a striving for wind." If, as Wright suggests, the people of the kingdom prefer the youth to his companion/advisor because the youth is wise and the king foolish, it hardly justifies a verdict of **הבל**. However, we can retain much of Wright's reading without following his main point that the anecdote stands as a caution against the maxim that "better are two than one." Rather, the declaration of **הבל** is pronounced on the notion of progress undertaken by the king. He obviously was a man of great ability in order to rise from poverty and incarceration to the throne of the kingdom. However, his growing folly in later years results in his loss of the kingdom in favour of his younger, wise companion. That a man capable of such greatness in youth should embrace folly and subsequently be replaced demonstrates that progress is fleeting. Previous success is no guarantee of a clear path, and one's companion can

¹²² William A. Irwin, "Ecclesiastes 4:13-16," *JNES* 3 (1944): 255 complains that the passage's "confusion of pronominal antecedents is characteristic of Hebrew usage at its worst." But as Murphy and Huwiler, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, 193 remark, "The force of the segment as a whole, however, does not depend on knowing the details of the story."

¹²³ So also Delitzsch, *Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes*, 280-81. Many commentators see a second youth in the **הַיָּלֵד הַשֵּׁנִי** of v. 15 that is to be distinguished from the previous youth. See, for example, Longman III, *Ecclesiastes*, 144-47; Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 191; Lohfink, *Qoheleth*, 72-73; and Whybray, *Ecclesiastes*, 90. Schoors, *Preacher, Part II*, 345 is of the opinion that "there is no good reason to parse the ordinal as used substantively." Though, it is used substantively in vv. 8 and 10 providing some impetus for the reading.

¹²⁴ Wright, "The Poor But Wise Youth and the Old But Foolish King," 148-51. Fox, *Time to Tear Down*, 224-27 opts instead for four characters: old king, wise youth, poor man, and the young man succeeding the first youth. Fox's argument stands on the use of **כִּי גַם** (286), which should not be rendered "although" as Gordis, *Man and His World*, 244 suggests. HALOT treats **כִּי גַם** ("even though") and **כִּי גַם** ("even when") similarly (s.v. **גַם**). BDB (s.v. **גַם**) also proposes "though even, although" with reference to Delitzsch, *Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes*, 279 for its use at 4:14. While Fox's rendering makes good sense of the grammar, one fails to see how the anecdote benefits from this rendering. One would have to assume, as Fox appears to assume, that **כִּי גַם בְּמִלְכוּתוֹ נוֹלַד רֵשַׁע** not only means that there was another youth born (Fox's *youth*²), but that that he also went on to reign. Otherwise, there would be no point mentioning this "poor" character. But that reads a great deal into the sentence. So while the concessive meaning of **כִּי גַם** may not be widely attested elsewhere in Ecclesiastes, it certainly makes the greatest sense in 4:14. See the discussion in Schoors, *Preacher, Part I*, 130.

easily become one's nemesis and successor. Great achievement cannot guarantee continued success.

We have already noted Qoheleth's view on accumulation, but we return to the subject of wealth and wisdom as it reflects Qoheleth's view of progress in 6:7-9. The connection between the verses is puzzling and some suggest that v. 8 "interrupts the connection between verses 7 and 9 and may be misplaced."¹²⁵ The connection, however, with the surrounding verses on wealth comes through wisdom's association with successful, often materialistic, choices.¹²⁶ Wisdom purports to lead to material blessing (e.g., Prov 8:18). Qoheleth's suggestion is that since one can never be satisfied by accumulation, wisdom as a means of wealth production does not represent progress. The second half of v. 8 has numerous challenges.¹²⁷ As one reading the text without emendation, Gordis suggests "Why should a poor man know how to face life?"¹²⁸ This is an attempt to understand the phrase in its own right, but lacks parallelism with the previous sentence. If one attempts to keep the cadence of the first verse with its ל...מה by supplying the וְהָיָה then something like Longman's rendering appears: "What do the poor have by knowing how to act in front of the living?"¹²⁹ Alternatively, one could seek a total parallel by the ellipsis of both וְהָיָה and מִן resulting in "What advantage has the poor man over him who knows..."¹³⁰ It is not strictly necessary to choose between the options for our purpose here. That the second phrase has some grammatical or thematic connection to the first can be assumed. The overall thrust of vv. 7-9 reveals that wisdom fails to provide

¹²⁵ Fox, *Ecclesiastes*, 41.

¹²⁶ So Longman III, *Ecclesiastes*, 174. This is not the opinion, however of Reines, "Wisdom and Wealth," 83-84 who suggests that the references to wisdom providing wealth were to dissuade people from pursuing business in order to study. He suggests that Qoheleth's remarks on wealth were meant to protest against rich wisdom teachers.

¹²⁷ So much so that Whybray, *Ecclesiastes*, 108 speaks of its early corruption and unrecoverable original form, and Ehrlich, *Randglossen zur hebräischen Bibel: textkritisches, sprachliches und sachliches*, 7: Hohes Lied, Ruth, Klagelieder, Koheleth, Esther, Daniel, Esra, Nehemia, Könige, Chronik, Nachträge und Gesamtregister (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs, 1914), 80 states tongue in cheek, "Was der Verfasser mit וְהָיָה מִן לֵאמֹר meint, wissen nur die Götter."

¹²⁸ Gordis, *Man and His World*, 261. Also Fox, *Time to Tear Down*, 245 notices through Ehrlich the construction ל...מה plus participle equates as "why should X do Y?" Schoors, *Preacher, Part I*, 165 pronounces Gordis' explanation as "convincing" while acknowledging that it is also "a good possibility that the two parts of the verse are completely parallel."

¹²⁹ Longman III, *Ecclesiastes*, 164.

¹³⁰ For example, Edward Hayes Plumptre, *Ecclesiastes*, ed. J.J.S. Perowne, The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1888), 157.

satisfaction as a means to material resources. One finds a strong connection between the acquisition of wisdom and the acquisition of wealth,¹³¹ but here it is subverted by the lifespan declaration that neither the wise, nor the fool, nor the poor can ultimately be satiated.

The preceding reflections lead to a resumption in 6:12b of the lead question Qoheleth addresses: “who is the one knowing what is good for a human in life, the number of days of his absurd life?” While Qoheleth has variously declared certain actions or events to be “good,” these have been at the level of event time and are appropriate for the moment. But the longing continues for someone to declare what may be considered worthy at the level of lifespan time, which is formless as the shadow. This challenge is toward a better and grander solution.

The uncertainty of the future is also taken up in 8:7. While the temporal phrase *מה־שִׁיחִיָּה* is not specifically lifelong,¹³² Qoheleth’s perspective certainly advocates that there is never a time when one can be certain of what will be. As Davis has noted,¹³³ the theme of power runs through vv. 4-9 by the connection of *שָׁלַטוֹן* in vv. 4 and 8b, *שָׁלַט* in v. 8a and the verb *שָׁלַט* in v. 9. In light of the power humans have over one another, and the *רַעַת הָאָדָם רַבָּה*,¹³⁴ it is impossible to chart a course through the fog of the future.

Human corruption coupled with delayed punishment links 8:7 to 8:11-13 as Qoheleth considers the lifespan effects of righteous and wicked behaviour. Qoheleth observes in 8:12 the lack of speedy response against an evil work. The adverb *מִהֲרָה* occurs otherwise only in Ecclesiastes at 4:12 describing the inability of a threefold cord to be broken “quickly.” In other places, it has the sense of “without delay” and may be used to describe actions that take place immediately (e.g., Num 17:11; Josh 8:19), or actions that may begin without delay but whose effect would be

¹³¹ See, for example, the offer of wealth by Lady Wisdom in Prov 8:18-21. John W. Olley, “‘Righteous’ and wealthy? The descriptions of the *ṣaddiq* in wisdom literature,” *Colloq* 22 (1990): 42-43 makes the case that in Proverbs, as in wisdom literature in general, there is a strong connection between being “righteous” and wealth acquisition.

¹³² In other locations we have designated *שִׁיחִיָּה* as reflecting lifespan time (6:3) and generation time (1:9,11; 2:18; 3:22 and 10:14).

¹³³ Davis, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs*, 208.

¹³⁴ In our reading of 3:11, the presence of God’s *עוֹלָם* is to assist humans to comprehend God’s work, but at various points Qoheleth seems to indicate that it is human *רַעַת* that makes this comprehension impossible (cf. 8:6 and 3:16).

seen much later. For example, Deut 11:17 describes the punishment for turning and serving other gods as resulting in the withholding of rain resulting in the Israelites perishing “quickly (מִהֲרָא) from upon the good land that the LORD is giving you.” This process would take time, but is reckoned as מִהֲרָא because it would begin without delay. Qoheleth’s lament, therefore, is not that there is not an immediate result, but rather the lack of connection between deed and consequence.¹³⁵ Qoheleth observes that this only emboldens humans to act wickedly, even to the point of excess (vv. 11-12a).

The difficulty presented by vv. 12b-13 is, again, a function of Qoheleth’s temporal views. Earlier critics, recognizing the opposing view it offers to vv. 11-12a, described this section as a gloss,¹³⁶ while others have suggested this as a quotation of an alternative point of view.¹³⁷ While the theme of vv. 12b-13 appears at odds with v. 12a, it is temporally coherent. The belief that there is some consequence for wickedness (v. 13) and some reward for righteousness (v. 12) is not incongruent with the temporal scheme we have noticed since it occurs at a level of time inaccessible to intentional human activity and in the uncontrollable movement of the divine and the conglomerate of human influences. The statements in vv. 11-12a indicate that event time appears to have no immediate consequences in that “wicked” events do not amount to a certain foreseeable outcome. The approach in vv. 12b-13 is by faith at the level of divine action, and is offered as a general assent rather than a solid observation,¹³⁸ it fits the notions of power and temporality developed in Eccl 1-7.

Following a commendation of enjoyment in 8:15, Qoheleth again expresses the frustration that life “on earth” is a mystery of epic proportions. The whole of vv.

¹³⁵ Adams, *Wisdom in Transition*, 152 concludes that Ecclesiastes lacks any “reliable act-consequence relationship.”

¹³⁶ Barton, *Ecclesiastes*, 153-54, and to a lesser extent Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 155. More recently Adams, *Wisdom in Transition*, 143 has a similar view.

¹³⁷ So Loader, *Polar Structures*, 100, Lohfink, *Qoheleth*, 108, and Gordis, *Man and His World*, 293. The latter suggests that the use of מִיָּדָא is “used by Qoheleth at times to introduce a quotation of conventional cast which he does not accept.” Schwienhorst-Schönberger, *Kohelet*, 425-26 also follows this general trend, though he suggests that the alternative voice is that of the “author” of Qoheleth apart from the character.

¹³⁸ So Isaksson, *Studies in Qohelet*, 67, followed by Longman III, *Ecclesiastes*, 221 and Schoors, *Preacher, Part I*, 185. Isaksson suggests that the unique use of the participle form of יָדָע rather than the suffix conjugation is indicative of general assent to a common idea rather than flowing from Qoheleth’s own observations. Qoheleth’s usual manner of expressing his own experience is יָדָעְתִּי.

16-17 is a lexical and syntactical puzzle.¹³⁹ Commentators have noted that this verse is of great importance to the thought of Qoheleth because “[t]his verse explicitly equates God’s work with activity on earth—elsewhere Qoheleth only implies that whatever occurs is God’s doing.”¹⁴⁰ Qoheleth’s mission was “to comprehend life,”¹⁴¹ that is, how all the pieces work together toward the whole (lifespan time or greater). Qoheleth frequently admits, as he does here, that this mission has resulted in failure and the project itself is ultimately unknowable.

Summary: Lifespan Time

The observations of Qoheleth that rise to the level of lifespan time are woven throughout these musings.¹⁴² What identifies these lifespan remarks is the desire to capture the essence of a human life as a whole and to identify both a direction and a destination that provides purpose to existence.

The unifying theme is that nothing at the level of an individual’s lifespan can be considered progressive. The future will always be impenetrable to human vision regardless of the methodology used in life (7:16-17; 8:14). Even wisdom and righteousness do not provide a fool-proof pattern to reach a prescribed destination. Accumulation of goods is a dead-end journey since even virtually unlimited wealth guarantees nothing except the momentary enjoyment of seeing what one has acquired (5:9-10). The only possible good that results from accumulation is the ability to pass on wealth to an heir, but that benefit is solely for the heir and offers nothing lasting for the one who accumulates.

¹³⁹ Schoors, *Preacher, Part I*, 135-36 and Schoors, *Preacher, Part II*, 71-73 provide a helpful summary of the issues, especially with relation to the relation of v. 17b to v. 17a and the function of כִּי. Piecing together his translation of vv. 16-17, one arrives at “‘When I applied my mind to know wisdom and to consider the business that is done on earth — for neither day nor night one’s eyes see sleep —, then I saw’ [all the work of God] ‘that man is not able to discover the work which is done under the sun.’” Schoors, *Preacher, Part II*, 72 suggests that “there seems to be a double object [for רָאִיתִי], viz. אֶת-כָּל-מַעֲשֵׂה הָאֱלֹהִים and the כִּי-clause.” Of course, the double object, if this is the case, is expressed in an awkward manner with the first object indicated by the direct object marker and the other by כִּי.

¹⁴⁰ Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 157. See also Bartholomew, *Ecclesiastes*, 292 and Lohfink, *Qoheleth*, 110-11.

¹⁴¹ Fox, *Ecclesiastes*, 60.

¹⁴² We have identified 3:9, 10, 18-21; 4:7-8; 5:9-10, 12-16, 17-18, 19; 6:2, 3, 4-6, 7-9; 7:1-2, 15-20, 23-29; 8:7, 11-13, 15, 16-17; 9:4,9 as reflecting lifespan time.

Chapter Five: Furthest Reaches: Nature's, Generation and Lifespan Time

We have seen that only two positive affirmations are made regarding what is good and profitable over the course of a lifetime. First, one's lifetime must be lived with the knowledge that life, including influence, is finite (7:1-2). The exhortation, in light of the overall presentation of lifespan time, is to discourage Qoheleth's audience from embarking on grand notions of creating some lasting impact upon the world (3:9-10; 7:24-25). Reflection on the finitude of existence sobers human beings to embrace a smaller vision. But that smaller vision includes, second, the encouragement to live a life containing suitable measures of enjoyment, including eating, drinking, enjoying labour and companionship (5:17-18). Far from "life is short, make each moment count," Qoheleth's vision of enjoyment is more pedestrian. Nothing, including long life, wealth or offspring, can make up for a life that has lacked enjoyment (6:4-6). But Qoheleth does not abandon the notion that wickedness can cut short life, and so a life devoid of wisdom or righteousness is hardly advocated (7:17). Rather, the life that includes enjoyment as a necessary ingredient is beneficial, but it should hardly be the only ingredient. One can question whether enjoyment is possible without wisdom. This discussion is a part of the discussion of event time, which the next chapter will address.

Conclusions

This chapter has demonstrated that time itself is a source of frustration for Qoheleth, or more specifically, the passing of time, in the quest for understanding the sum of all things. We have demonstrated from the investigation of nature's time and generation time that Qoheleth considers these horizons of time as inaccessible to human plans and immutable from human action. Nature's time is the prerogative of the divine, with whom humans cannot contend (3:14, 15; 6:10; 7:14). While generation time takes into account human action, Qoheleth's experience teaches him that nothing survives death. The deep-seated loves and hates of one generation are not necessarily appropriated by the next (9:1-2). While Qoheleth does open up the possibility that wisdom could be passed on as an inheritance, wisdom's power is not sufficient to shape human progress over the course of generations (7:11-13).

This inability to shape generations is an extrapolation from the inability for human beings to shape the trajectory of an individual life in any meaningful way. Qoheleth questions and challenges even the wisest to demonstrate a knowledge of how life (or events) will unfold in the future (3:22b, 6:12b, 7:14b). Qoheleth reveals

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that there is no code of conduct, whether wisdom/folly or righteousness/wickedness, that is capable of shaping lifespan time to guarantee a specific result. The only certainties are death and the absurdity of sacrificing enjoyment for the sake of some grander vision.

This exploration of the higher temporal levels in Qoheleth's thought, and the negative judgements Qoheleth makes concerning these levels, points us toward the temporal level yet to be explored, event time.

Chapter Six: Qoheleth's Evaluation of Event Time

Introduction

The central question of Ecclesiastes, which inquires after יִתְרוֹן, points the reader toward lifetime considerations. But human experience is itself built upon events, as Qoheleth's enigmatic poem of 3:1-8 discloses. We have considered the use of עָתָה previously and concluded that the use of the lexeme in Qoheleth's speech focuses upon limitation rather than determinism.¹ The repetition of עָתָה, then, draws the reader toward event time. The poem presents a list of actions, limited in duration, that occur in event time for which human beings are the prime actors. None of the parallels imply any sort of value judgement, and even viewing the pairs as representing a strict positive and negative parallel does not inform us of any value judgement on the list as a whole.² It simply states that human life is full of activity. It is only in v. 9 that Qoheleth begins the process of questioning how the events of life are put together into a larger whole: "What is the advantage of the doer³ in that which he toils?"

Since the conclusion of Ecclesiastes is stated at the beginning (1:2), we have already considered how the greater spans of time are off-limits to human creativity. Something, or someone, limits human ability to enable sustained and predictable efforts to make a dent upon lifespan time or generation time. But why is that so? And in light of human ineffectuality, why does the frame-narrator consider Qoheleth one who taught knowledge and arranged proverbs, which is certainly a positive portrayal. Why are Qoheleth's thoughts filled with wise advice in light of the conclusions drawn about human inability to affect the overall shape of life? These questions can be answered through an investigation of event time.

¹ See the discussion of עָתָה in chapter 2. This is not to say that the poem, if independent from the context in Eccl 3, could not be used this way. But in its present context, it is not necessary or desirable to see Qoheleth advocating that there is some theoretical ideal time for each action. Rather, Qoheleth has been previously demonstrating that individual actions cannot be compounded into some larger, more meaningful whole. He never laments that he never managed to do the right activity at "just the right time."

² Though this is clearly not the case in Loader, *Polar Structures*, 29-33 as the effect of his strict positive pole ("life, conservation") and negative pole ("abandonment, death") suggests, "No security, surrender of helpless man to the eventualities of life."

³ A similar expression is in 1:3 מִהִיתְרוֹן לְאָדָם בְּכָל-עֲמָלוֹ. In fact, the Vulgate uses the same expression in both places (*homo* for הָעוֹשֶׂה in v. 9) though the LXX preserves the participle (τοῦ ποιοῦντος). Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 162 reasons that the expressions are equal.

Chapter Six: Qoheleth's Evaluation of Event Time

The format of the present chapter will be to consider events that Qoheleth judges to be negative, and those events judged to be positive before concluding with a consideration of the many places where Qoheleth provides his wise sayings.

Events Portrayed as Negative

While in Qoheleth's self-introduction, numerous situations occurring in event time are described as positive, this is not the case throughout the remainder of the work. The chief causes of negative experiences in event time are wickedness/oppression, dissatisfaction and reflection.

Wickedness and Oppression

Qoheleth first introduces wickedness into his investigation in 3:16. There he describes the event of wickedness (רשע) that takes place in locations that should promote justice and righteousness. We contend that wickedness, righteousness and justice, as Qoheleth presents them, should be read as events. These are abstract concepts, but those that are made concrete through actions that display these characteristics. Qoheleth encounters events that he adjudicates as wicked, or righteous, or just. Qoheleth has demonstrated in the poem of 3:1-8 that human life is full of busy-ness, while in 3:16 Qoheleth establishes that not all human business is positive or praiseworthy.

The presence of injustice leads Qoheleth in v. 17 to make the first of two comments introduced by אָמַרְתִּי אֲנִי בַל־בִּי. Qoheleth reasons within himself that God's judgement is forthcoming. While it is attractive for some to see שְׁפַט as indicative of death,⁴ or of some sort of final judgement,⁵ the second half of the verse indicates that event time is actually in view due to the presence of the short-duration word עַתָּה. Far from indicating a situation whereby the righteous are rewarded and the wicked punished, both the righteous and the wicked together are judged (שְׁפַט). Just as there is little distinction made between humans and animals in the following verse, so no distinction is made between the righteous and the wicked here. The reason given is that there is a time (i.e., limitation) for both "every matter" and "every work." The judgement is not a separate entity from the limitation, but rather

⁴ Fox, *Time to Tear Down*, 215.

⁵ Schwienhorst-Schönberger, *Kohelet*, 281.

the judgement is the limitation. The limitation of everything is the judgement of God on both the wicked and the righteous. This creates a situation whereby neither wicked action nor righteous action becomes foundational for long-term action in lifespan time. All actions are finite.⁶ The judgement is not only limitation in death, though death becomes the final limitation. Rather, the judgement of God upon all is that human action is of limited duration (event time) and therefore of limited effectiveness.

This powerlessness is further highlighted in 8:8-10. Here Qoheleth offers four examples of the inability to control events: the wind, the day of death, the battle, and the outcome of wickedness. There is a tendency to connect the expression **אין אדם שליט ברוח לכלוא את הרוח** as a parallel expression to **אין שלטון ביום המות** so that **רוח** has the sense of “life-breath.” Krüger, for example, sees v. 8 as addressing the powers of the king, picking up the theme of vv. 2-5. For Krüger, the wise man must recognize that the king does not have absolute authority over his own life breath, or that of his subjects.⁷ This line of thought raises a number of issues. First, it would place the rationale for Qoheleth's advice in the limitation of human power with reference to death. The rationale in vv. 5b-7, however, is that of time rather than the limitation of power. The powerlessness at issue is the powerlessness of the sage rather than the ultimate powerlessness of the king. One cannot grasp what will happen because no one has power over nature (**רוח**), their own bodies (**יום המות**), or the forces of national politics (**מלחמה**). Even those who act wickedly are no more able to control these things than those who act righteously.⁸ These events take place in a time of their own apart from individual human choice or decision.

The second reason to avoid equating **רוח** with “life-breath” is the method of reading. Fox suggests that one's first reading of **רוח** would be ambiguous, but that the following expression **ביום המות** causes the reader to re-read the previous

⁶ While space does not permit the investigation here, given that others have noted the influence of the early chapters of Genesis upon Qoheleth's thought, one can see a connection between Qoheleth's view of human limitation and the limitation placed on humanity in the narrative of the Tower of Babel.

⁷ Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 156. Fox, *Time to Tear Down*, 280 sees a similar connection with the ruler mentioned in vv. 2-5.

⁸ The meaning of this last statement is quite ambiguous. As Fox, *Ecclesiastes*, 57 rightly notes, “This is self-evident, and no one (including the wicked) would think otherwise.”

statement in light of the second. The notion of “re-reading” the earlier line in light of the second is an interesting one, and raises the question of how individual’s “read” texts. Is it a constant back-and-forth, or do reader’s read in a linear fashion?⁹ If we grant Fox that this re-reading is the norm, then we must also ask how the reader would understand colons 3 and 4. Would these not also need to form some sort of parallelism to fit this scheme, or at the very least, would not colon 3 need to be seen as parallel to the first two? The lack of connection between the remaining colons would seem to work against Fox’s assumption that the reader would read backwards unless colons 1 and 2 are taken in isolation from 3 and 4. In light of this, it seems best to take each colon at face value: no one can control the wind, the day of death, or battles. All of this takes place in the context of the wise man and the choices he faces in adverse circumstances. While time and chance may be viewed as negative to the accomplishment of one’s goals, these also have the effect of sometimes curbing the potential negative effects of courses of action that are less than desirable.

Temporally, v. 8 deals with event time. Not every event is controllable,¹⁰ and while this wreaks havoc on individual lifespan goals, it does have the advantage of curtailing the lifespan goals of others (e.g., even the king) if and when these are contradictory to one’s own. Qoheleth has borne all these things in mind even as he considers how oppression occurs throughout any human institutions of power (v. 9).

The fourth chapter also begins with an observation of oppression. The mention in v. 1 of seeing “oppression” and “tears of the oppressed” informs us that events are in focus. Qoheleth judges that death itself is preferable to a life filled with oppression (v. 2). Oppression is so common, Qoheleth later admits (5:7), that it ought not lead to astonishment (אֵל־תִּתְמַד). Human life is deeply flawed, and human institutions perpetuate power and oppression. This is furthered by lack of

⁹ Fox, *Time to Tear Down*, 280.

¹⁰ We consider the final expression of the quartet, וְלֹא־יִמְלֹךְ רָשָׁע אֶת־בְּעָלֵי יוֹ, to also refer to event time. Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 157 suggests this is an allusion back to vv. 2-3 and holds that even if one is willing to participate in injustice on the king’s orders, this “kind of extreme opportunistic behavior cannot in the long run “save” a person from misfortune.” Krüger’s suggestion that this applies “in the long run” would remove this statement from event time and place it more in the realm of lifespan time. But it is inadvisable to give this last statement a different temporal outlook than the preceding three, which are clearly events. Rather, the sentiment is that, given the powerlessness of humans to string together event time into a meaningful whole, opportunistically choosing a wicked path has no more, and perhaps less, value than the righteous path. This is a different context than vv. 2-3 where taking the morally corrupt choice is not the wise man’s prerogative but is based on the king’s command.

evidence concerning judgement (8:11). While Qoheleth has expressed confidence that God judges humankind in general by limiting human endeavours to mere acts (events), the acts themselves seem to abound.

Dissatisfaction

Qoheleth also expresses a negative view of event time when it is filled with dissatisfaction. We see this, for example, in 5:9 where Qoheleth begins to consider money and goods, which forms the basis of the discussion through 6:9. Classifying someone as a “lover of money” arises because of the behaviour where retaining money or earning money is of greater value than consuming it. This choice of preserving rather than using results in deep dissatisfaction since the goal (accumulation) is a never-ending goal. As it was in 4:8, the one who is unsatisfied does not experience true enjoyment in the moments of life. Qoheleth judges this deep inability to enjoy event time as “vanity.”

Similarly, Qoheleth addresses the “grievous evil” in 5:12 that we have considered in the previous chapter. There we considered the holding (שְׁמוֹר) of riches to be an event whereby wealth, which could have been used was retained resulting in the loss of the wealth in a subsequent event. The ongoing narrative between v. 12 and v. 16 follows the continuing series of events that results in days of darkness, vexation, sickness, and resentment. The individual who experiences all of these events is to be pitied because the moments were filled with dissatisfaction rather than the positive affirmation Qoheleth makes regarding enjoyment (v. 17).

We may also include Qoheleth's grand summation of human effort in 4:4 under the category of dissatisfaction: “And I saw all toil and all the skill of work, that it is jealousy toward a man from his friend.”¹¹ Event time is driven by personal ambition as a result of envy, and this Qoheleth judges as הַבֵּל וְרַעוּת רֵיחַ. In line with this judgement is Qoheleth's statement in 6:7 that “All one's toil is for his mouth, yet the soul is not satisfied.” The referent, הָאָדָם, is a switch from the

¹¹ For the last portion of the verse, see Schoors, *Preacher, Part I*, 171-72. The word עֲמָל may broadly refer to the “affliction, or rather the misery, that is part of the fundamental human condition” in wisdom literature (TDOT, s.v. עֲמָל, II,4). The noun כִּשְׂרוֹן is unique to Qoheleth and has a sense of “skill,” and here “skill of work.” See Schoors, *Preacher, Part II*, 447-49 and Fox, *Time to Tear Down*, 220.

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subject of the superman of vv. 3-6 as Qoheleth moves to consider the toil of humans more generally.¹²

One can argue that v. 7 forms an objection to the advice to eat and drink since nothing can quench the “appetite” (צֶמֶךְ) of human beings. While it is “good,” it is not able to satisfy. But as Krüger suggests, v. 7 also forms a fitting continuation to the previous statements regarding enjoyment and property by focussing on the temporal limitations. He writes:

If “eating and drinking” are the highest good for a person and one can never satisfy one’s hunger and thirst for more than a limited time, human happiness at any given time is always attainable only in the present moment. Therefore, the experience of happiness in eating, drinking, and pleasure is, on the one hand, ephemeral for human beings; on the other hand, they can also have this experience again and again in their lives. The insight into this transitory character of happiness can keep people from developing unfulfillable wishes (cf. v. 9)...¹³

Understood in this way, v. 7 is grounded in event time, applicable to all people at all times, and makes a negative statement leading indirectly to a positive assertion regarding the proper use of event time. The desire to use event time as a means of satisfying lifespan time is an impossible task, but to live without recognizing that the goal of toil is consumption results in dissatisfaction.

Reflection

We have already discussed the three passages we will include here in our discussion of lifespan time in the previous chapter. There we noted how Qoheleth adjudicates reflection upon one’s accomplishments in lifespan time as folly. But reflection itself is an act, and thus also belongs here under the category of negative uses of event time.

¹² It is tempting to follow Barton, *Ecclesiastes*, 135, who himself follows Ginsberg, *Qoheleth*, 363, to suggest that צֶמֶךְ refers to the previously mentioned man who has been the character in question since v. 3. This is a minority position, however, and would appear out of line with other uses of צֶמֶךְ as a universalising expression (cf. 6:1). See Schoors, *Preacher, Part II*, 48.

¹³ Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 127.

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Qoheleth remarks in 5:19 that, “not much will he remember the days of his life, for God is occupying [him]¹⁴ with the joy of his heart.” Reflection upon the past will not bring about the joy (שְׂמֵחָה) that humans access through the gift of God, which is the enjoyment of wealth and toil. Qoheleth mentions שְׂמֵחָה on four occasions in his self-introduction (1:12-2:26). While Qoheleth experienced שְׂמֵחָה abundantly, it was in the context of searching for the key to lifespan time and it was judged to be הַבֵּל (2:1) and of little use (2:10). But outside of this intense search, Qoheleth confesses in 5:19 that it acts as a distraction from the challenges of life.

Qoheleth's strong statement in 7:10 regarding the folly of comparisons may also be added to our evidence that reflection upon the past is an improper use of event time. We have previously identified the object of reflection as generation time, which contains little value in Qoheleth's viewpoint, since the connection between past events and current events is tenuous at best. These forlorn sentiments merely distract from the positive use of event time, which we will discuss shortly.

Summary

Event time represents the temporal level that humans are able to harness and utilize. For Qoheleth, this does not mean that humans use event time solely for good. Oppression and wickedness represent two examples of event time perverted for the gain of some at the cost of others. This, Qoheleth admits, is part of the very fabric of life and ought not to surprise anyone. His writing suggests, however, that wickedness and oppression, while rampant, are limited in duration. Just as lifespan time cannot be positively harnessed for good and benefit, Qoheleth sees a limitation in wickedness as well. It is a part of the fabric of human existence but it cannot be expanded to achieve a result lifespan time either. Human's are not capable of sustained goodness or sustained wickedness to affect lifespan time either way. Some oppression can even be “waited out” with the wise man's participation. Limitation is then both a blessing and a curse.

Event time utilized without satisfaction or spent in reflection represent two other negative avenues of human endeavour. These activities, while not harming others, are likewise denigrated by Qoheleth as tragic and useless. Both represent an

¹⁴ As Barton, “The Text and Interpretation of Ecclesiastes 5:19,” 65 has noted, there is no expressed object for מְעַנֶּה. He proposes, based on LXX, to read מְעַנֶּהוּ, and this is followed by the majority of commentators as well as suggested by BHQ.

attempt to sacrifice of the current moment for the sake of a larger scale of time. In the examples of dissatisfaction Qoheleth uses, it derives from an unwillingness to use material resources in the moment for the hope of some future gain. But the powerlessness of human beings in the wider world makes this gamble untenable. In the examples of reflection, Qoheleth dismisses the desire to see trends either in life or in the lives of previous generations. Since there is a disconnect between event time and the greater horizons, any desire to see a pattern leading toward a more profitable destination becomes pointless.

In light of these negative uses of event time, we must now turn to consider how Qoheleth envisions a positive use of event time.

Events Portrayed as Positive

Positive events are those activities that Qoheleth suggests should be a part of human experience. The introduction of Qoheleth indicates that he found enjoyment in his toil (2:11) as well as eating, drinking and finding enjoyment in work (2:24). We will explore the remainder of Qoheleth's expression to see how these and other activities are encouraged. We have placed the discussion under the following headings: companionship, peace, and enjoyment.

Companionship

Qoheleth addresses both sides of companionship. The one who is alone without brother or son, but who labours continuously forms the basis of discussion in 4:8, while in the next four verses (4:9-12) positively promote sharing life's experiences.¹⁵ We suggest that Qoheleth's approval of companionship should be viewed at the event time level rather than lifespan time. It is easy to blur the distinction, however, as we may demonstrate through Seow's explanation.¹⁶ Seow identifies three benefits of companionship in vv. 10-12. First, there is the benefit of companionship when one gets into trouble (v. 10). Seow suggests, "the author is

¹⁵ It is not necessary to see "the one" of v. 9 as the same solitary individual in vv. 7-8. Otherwise, one has to propose that the "good reward for their toil" refers to "the possibility of sharing what one gains, of mutual assistance" (so Ogden, *Qoheleth*, 73). This seems to be a stretch on the nuance of שָׂכָר, which is almost exclusively an economic term (HALOT, s.v. שָׂכָר). That we find teaching material related by keyword rather than by direct argumentation is not surprising (Longman III, *Ecclesiastes*, 140).

¹⁶ Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 188-90.

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probably thinking here of the perils of travelling alone through the wilderness. The loner who falls into a pit (cf. Prov 26:27; 28:10, 14; 28:18), presumably a camouflaged trap set for animals...is doomed.” This first benefit is clearly situational. Second, a companion can also keep one warm, and “again, the author is probably referring here to people who are travelling through the wilderness.” The second benefit is also clearly situational. Third, a companion is of great assistance when one is under attack, which is clearly situational. But Seow’s goes a step further to suggest, “Qoheleth intimates that because *life’s* journey is difficult and perilous, it is better that one not face it alone” (emphasis mine). The event time advice of Qoheleth is on the verge of becoming lifespan advice in Seow’s commentary.¹⁷ But much of Eccl 4 has event time in focus, and so it is wise, from Qoheleth’s point of view, that each event should be undertaken in the companionship of others. In each of these examples, there is almost certain peril and risk of bodily harm in these events, which companionship mitigates.

We have already examined the exhortation of Qoheleth to enjoyment with one’s wife (9:9). We suggested previously that Qoheleth’s advice here is directed at lifespan time. The relationship is seen as enduring unlike 4:9-12, which is much more situational. However, it does serve to reinforce that Qoheleth finds great comfort in companionship.

This stands in contrast to the isolation caused by oppression, as we explored above. Qoheleth observed that with the oppressed there is “no one comforting them” (4:1). Qoheleth’s directs his condemnation at the act of oppression itself as well as the segregation it creates within the human community. Qoheleth encourages companionship as a positive use of event time.

Rest and Peace

Qoheleth also commends situations in which an individual experiences peace or rest. The proverb of 4:6 is quoted positively: “Better is a handful of rest (נַחֵ) than two handfuls of toil, and striving for wind.” That Qoheleth extols rest is also seen from 6:5, though in the context of lifespan time. There Qoheleth compares the

¹⁷ The interpretation of Gordis, *Man and His World*, 242 that this whole section is an ironic comment “limiting the benefits of family life to a few minor physical advantages” seems based on the notion that v. 11 must exclude friendship, perhaps due to its association with sexual imagery (he does not comment on 4:11). If this were the case, then the whole section would approach lifespan time.

stillborn child to a man who possesses much but without enjoyment. The stillborn child finds rest rather than the wealthy man.

Qoheleth's contrast in 5:11 also compares the benefits of riches to being at peace: "Sweet is the sleep of the worker, whether he eats little or much, but the abundance of the rich does not cause him to sleep." The event is the nightly ritual of rest. A contrast is made between the sleep of the laborer,¹⁸ and the rich man. The rich man's abundance robs him of sleep.¹⁹ The particular cause of the sleeplessness is unclear. Perhaps the cause is worry, brought about by the concern over loss of wealth.²⁰ Others suggest that since the worker ate, then the contrast is with the rich man who over-consumes and has some form of indigestion.²¹ It may also be that the rich man purposely avoids sleep because he is too busy accumulating.²² The laborer, however, has already consumed his property for dinner, and whether it is little or much, has already passed out of existence and out of mind.²³ The opportunity to experience rest and peace are presented favorably by Qoheleth.

While expressed philosophically rather than as an observation, 6:9 also exhorts satisfaction and peace rather than restless desire. Here two concepts are contrasted in one of Qoheleth's "better-than" sayings: the "sight of the eyes" (מראה עינים) to the "passing of desire" (הלך-נפש). There are similarities between 5:9 and 6:9 both in structure and in content. Fredericks has argued that these verses form the outside of a chiasmic structure.²⁴ Both contain a הבל-clause and concern the satisfaction of appetites. While 5:9 speaks of the lack of satisfaction brought about by the possession of money or the possession of wealth, 6:9 offers a

¹⁸ MT reads דָּעֶבֶד. LXX reads τοῦ δούλου, but Vulgate, Syriac and Targum support MT. While Fox, *Time to Tear Down*, 236 prefers "the slave" due to its fitting contrast with the "rich man," the MT rendering is not unintelligible and has support. There is no compelling reason to abandon it.

¹⁹ Schoors, *Preacher, Part II*, 248 suggests that שֹׁבֵעַ governing the noun עֲשִׂיר with the preposition לִ "signifies the surfeit of the rich or the overabundance of his wealth."

²⁰ So Fox, *Ecclesiastes*, 36 and Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 121.

²¹ Brown, *Ecclesiastes*, 61 suggests the theme is consumption, as does Gordis, *Man and His World*, 168, Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 220, and Whybray, *Ecclesiastes*, 99.

²² Similarly 4:8. Longman III, *Ecclesiastes*, 165 posits this explanation along with the possibilities of worry and indigestion.

²³ There is a certain tension in the situation, however, given it could just as easily be used to approve the possession of a surplus; the rich man will not lose sleep wondering from where his next meal will come, while this concern will constantly face the worker. See Prov 10:15, or even the two-sided 13:8.

²⁴ Fredericks, "Chiasm and Parallel Structure," 20.

better solution, which is the **טְרַאָה עֵינַיִם**. The same expression occurs in 11:9 there in parallel with **דְּרַכִּי לִבְךָ**, and encourages good living through enjoyment. This same sense fits 6:9 as well. Enjoyment is better than the “passing of desire.” There is no need to see this as an indication of death,²⁵ and those who do so argue that **הָלַךְ** in Qoheleth is a euphemism for death. As we have already shown above, this is not the case. Instead, it is the restless movement of the appetite from one item to the next as opposed to an enjoyment of what is already obtained. This interpretation is further confirmed by looking at the temporal parallelism. We have characterized enjoyment as an event. We should expect that one event time activity would be paralleled by another rather than by a longer enduring activity such as death. Desire, especially if it is shifting desire, is best characterized as event time and so fits the temporal constraints of the saying. Qoheleth has already revealed that not all events are created equal in their ability to bring enjoyment.

The final phrase of v. 9 introduces a contrary idea: **גַּם-זֶה הַבֵּל**. The referent of **זֶה** is variously taken as referring either to the whole verse,²⁶ or to the second part only,²⁷ though it has the possibility of covering the whole section.²⁸ It seems too convenient and straightforward, however, to suggest that **גַּם-זֶה הַבֵּל** only refers to the “passing of desire” where it would simply serve as a double affirmation of the “sight of the eyes” being superior. The use of **גַּם-זֶה הַבֵּל** in no way repudiates the saying making it invalid or operative,²⁹ but is rather Qoheleth’s way of stating his displeasure with the *status quo*. It, in fact, affirms that the saying is operative, but that it is unfortunate that it is so. The **הַבֵּל** statement does not need to focus only on one item or the other; that is, either the “passing of desire” or enjoyment. It could equally focus on the “better-than” idea. The parallel with 11:9 has already been

²⁵ For example, Whybray, *Ecclesiastes*, 109. Whybray acknowledges that the usual understanding of 6:9 as parallel to “a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush” fits well with Qoheleth’s general views, and suggests 5:17-19 and perhaps 6:7 as suitable parallels. On the other hand, Whybray suggests that viewing **הָלַךְ** as a reference to death is also characteristic of Qoheleth’s view that “life should be enjoyed to the full because it is at the very least preferable to the inevitable onset of death...” So also Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 228.

²⁶ Many do so including, for example, Gordis, *Man and His World*, 261, Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 130, Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 129, and Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, 54.

²⁷ Barton, *Ecclesiastes*, 136.

²⁸ A possibility raised by Longman III, *Ecclesiastes*, 175.

²⁹ As Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, 54 suggests when he writes “As the succeeding comment (“vanity”) shows, Qoheleth rejects this “better” saying.”

noted. There, Qoheleth encourages youth to walk in “the path of your heart and the sight of your eyes.” The “path of your heart” is an idea akin to the “passing of desire.” Qoheleth’s desire is for the youth to enjoy themselves and pursue both what they can see (מראי עיניך) and what they can imagine (דרכי לבך). The הבל statement in 6:9, then, is directed at the fact that one is, from a practical point of view, superior to the other. Too much imagination leaves one empty, so the feasting upon what is attainable avoids emptiness. Constraining oneself is a necessary absurdity, but for Qoheleth it is an absurdity nevertheless. So Qoheleth is able to both affirm the validity of enjoying what is before you while at the same time lamenting the fact that it is necessarily so.

Qoheleth’s summons to enjoyment is a frequent subject as we will now demonstrate.

Enjoyment

Qoheleth knows (ידעת), based on his own life search described in 1:12-2:26, that enjoyment is the greatest good. This is reaffirmed in 3:12. The presence of בחייו (“in his life”) does not mean that people should enjoy their life,³⁰ but rather is an invitation for people “to enjoy” and “to do good” in their life.³¹ When opportunities (event time) present themselves for enjoyment, one should take advantage. The presence of אכל, and שתה in 3:13 add content to the specific activities Qoheleth advocates as enjoyment along with ראה טוב בכל-עמלו.

The third chapter ends (v. 22a) with a similar call to enjoyment following the lifespan observations in vv. 18-21. Enjoyment (שמח) is the highest good Qoheleth identifies in event time, though it is important to Qoheleth’s overall presentation that

³⁰ One finds it difficult to agree with Whybray, “Preacher of Joy” that Qoheleth truly proclaims a joyful message. The idea of שמח for Qoheleth is more in line of enjoyment and pleasure than the confident trust that God reigns and enjoying oneself “is actually to do his will” (92). See Fox, *Time to Tear Down*, 113-15 for his thoughtful analysis.

³¹ The expression לעשות טוב is variously understood and variously translated. While the expression יעשה-טוב in 7:20 clearly has a moral sense, many commentators read לעשות טוב in light of ראה טוב בכל-עמלו in v. 13 and focus on enjoyment or happiness. According to Whybray, *Ecclesiastes*, 74, “there is little doubt that here [3:12] it means to realise happiness...and is the equivalent to *rā’āh tōb*.” Clearly neither “doing good” or “enjoyment” can be easily dismissed, and it would be a mistake to suggest that the notion of לעשות טוב is devoid of all ethical considerations (so Schwienhorst-Schönberger, *Kohelet*, 269). The “ethical” use in 7:20 is clearly part of an ethical discussion (7:15-20), while it does not have that emphasis in 3:12. Therefore, it seems satisfactory to give לעשות טוב the sense of “enjoying good things.”

this is seen in light of a general negative evaluation of lifespan and generation time as confirmed in v. 22b: “who can bring him to see what will be after him?”

Qoheleth also mentions eating, drinking and admiring one's work in 5:17-18. We considered these verses in the previous chapter as the one place where positive event time activities correspond to a potential positive evaluation of lifespan time (מִי־חַיִּי). If the foundations of eating, drinking, and seeing goodness in one's efforts are sufficient during the number of days given by God, then one has lived successfully, at least within the boundaries of what is possible for human beings. One finds a similar expression in 8:15 where Qoheleth commends eating, drinking and enjoyment as good activities that can “join [a person]” (יִלְוֶנּוּ) through all the days of life, again pointing to iterative enjoyment being useful on the level of lifespan time.

Positive advice toward enjoyment of event time also appears at 9:7-10. In this case, v. 7 returns to a positive appraisal of event time in contrast to the negative evaluation of generation time. The use of כָּבַר by translations as “long ago,” following Ginsberg³² and Jastrow,³³ is neither necessary nor desirable. There is no sense in Ecclesiastes that decisions have been set in motion in the distant past. Rather, the expression כָּבַר רָצָה הָאֱלֹהִים has the sense of a “future past.”³⁴ Qoheleth's imperative to “Go! Eat!” implies a future action, which allows the temporal adverb and perfect to describe an action in the future for the reader but God's approval as coming in the past with respect to the act of going and eating.³⁵

The referent of אֲתִמְעֵשׂ is also open to debate. Krüger's translation “this activity” makes the referent of מֵעֵשֶׂה eating bread and drinking wine.³⁶ But in no other case does מֵעֵשֶׂה refer to the acts of eating or drinking or enjoyment itself. In 3:22 the idea of enjoyment is tied to work: “I saw that there is nothing better than that one should rejoice in all his work, for that is his portion.” Still, enjoyment itself is not work but something that can go hand-in-hand with work. So, contra Krüger,

³² Ginsberg, *Qoheleth*, 415.

³³ Jastrow, s.v. כָּבַר.

³⁴ So Fox, *Time to Tear Down*, 294. According to J-M§112i, the perfect may function to describe “the anteriority of the action” that occurs in the domain of the future.

³⁵ So in Ps 127:1 “If the LORD *will not build* (לֹא־יִבְנֶה) the house, in vain they *will have laboured* (עָמְלוּ)” [emphasis added].

³⁶ Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 166.

מַעֲשֵׂה refers to one's labour, which being approved by God allows for enjoyment.³⁷ The temporal focus of v. 8 also occurs in event time. As we mentioned in the exploration of עַתָּה in chapter 2, the verse concerns life's simple pleasures as indicative of a good life.³⁸ The addition of בָּל suggests a continuity, while עַתָּה suggests something episodic, as does the use of the preposition בְּ. Based upon previous uses perhaps "every situation" is accurate. Ogden has suggested that in this present section (9:7-10) Qoheleth has begun to go beyond advocating for enjoyment and now commands it in light of generation time that will be spent in Sheol.³⁹ Ogden's insight is helpful here, though we would argue that the whole temporal scheme Qoheleth has been developing from his self-introduction has been pushing the reader in this direction.

We have already included 9:9 in our discussion of lifespan time, but as we have noted, the expression רַצָּה חַיִּים is an encouragement toward enjoyment and is thus an event even though this is expressed over the whole of lifespan time (בְּכָל-יְמֵי חַיֵּי הַבָּלֶךְ). Similarly, in v. 10 we find Qoheleth exhorting a proper use of event time, "Everything that your hand finds to do, with all your might do," within the context of generation time in the expression, "for there is no work nor thought nor knowledge nor wisdom in Sheol, concerning which you are going there." Qoheleth suggests some effort should be expended in event time, whether this activity is work or enjoyment. It is all that is accessible, and so it should not be treated lightly in view of the greater realities.⁴⁰

³⁷ Longman III, *Ecclesiastes*, 229 does not read רַצָּה as referring to a "future past," and takes issue with the suggestion of Ogden, *Qoheleth*, 164 that the context dictates that God's approval is not upon *any action* but those actions that meet with divine approval. Longman suggests that "this is not at all obvious," but little in Qoheleth is obvious! Rather, in light of Qoheleth's previous statements such as 5:19, it makes Ogden's suggestion entirely reasonable, if not completely obvious: "Likewise all to whom God gives wealth and possessions and whom he enables to enjoy them, and to accept their lot and find enjoyment in their toil—this is the gift of God."

³⁸ Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 301. As Boyle, "'Let your garments always be white' (Eccl 9:8): Time, fate, chance and provident design according to Qoheleth," 38 notes, "Qoheleth calls the reader to active engagement with life's pleasure rather than passive resignation in the face of its absurdity." There is resiliency in Ecclesiastes, for even as Qoheleth admits in 1:18 that "those who increase knowledge increase sorrow," resignation is never advocated but rather an embrace of what is within one's grasp rather than a constant lament over what is not.

³⁹ Ogden, "Qoheleth IX 1-16," 164.

⁴⁰ This verse (9:10) is not treated by Hinckley G. Mitchell, "'Work' in Ecclesiastes," *JBL* 32 (1913): 123-38 in his examination. We find Mitchell's treatment of Qoheleth's view of work to be very dependent upon his emendation of עַל in 3:11 to עָמַל thereby allowing him to suggest that Qoheleth "like the author of Gen. 3, reckoned [work] an evil to which men were inwardly urged, but from which they could to a great escape." Many of Mitchell's own criticisms can be accounted for by

Summary

Qoheleth's philosophy focuses on the utilization of event time to the greatest possible advantage. Since, in his view, event time cannot be constructed into profit on a greater scale, the best one can obtain is the utilization of event time to the fullest extent possible for momentary gain. This is found in companionship and rest/peace, which themselves are intimately joined to enjoyment. This comes as no surprise as enjoyment was already mentioned as the highest good at the end of Qoheleth's own self-presentation. The further examples and explanations Qoheleth provides in 3:1-12:7 do nothing to further the conclusion, but only to examine this conclusion from different angles.

There is one angle of event time that has not yet entered into our discussion, but the consideration of which cannot be avoided. As Ecclesiastes traditionally stands in the wisdom tradition, how do we account for the use of aphorisms in our temporal account? Our final exploration will be how wisdom fits into Qoheleth's conclusions. If wisdom has, as we suspect, little advantage at the level of lifespan time, what is the value of wisdom at all, including its value at the level of event time. It is to the exploration of wisdom and event time we now turn.

Event Time and the Sayings of Qoheleth

We will examine the affect of Qoheleth's temporal worldview on the presentation of wisdom by examining the temporality presented in the sayings of Qoheleth. We will utilize Michel's listing of identified sayings in Qoheleth for this purpose.⁴¹ These he identifies as:

4:5-6, 9, 12b, 13a, 17

5:2, 6, 9-11

6:7,9

recognizing the temporal scheme we have devised here. Work is positive as an event, but it does not have the ability to create something greater and more lasting, which Qoheleth decries.

⁴¹ Michel, *Qohelet*, 30 relies upon the work of Robert Franklin Johnson, "A Form-Critical Analysis of the Sayings in the Book of Ecclesiastes" (Th.D, Emory University, 1973). Johnson, 66-70, divides the sayings of into four form-critical categories: proverbs, moral sentences, paraenetic sayings (admonition and exhortation) and "other." We have not similarly divided the sayings into these categories, but rather observe them as a whole. Whether these represents original sayings, or are borrowed from elsewhere is not at issue here, and as Johnson, 66 observes "originality of authorship cannot be determined." We will assume that the sayings reflect the viewpoint of the character Qoheleth for nowhere does the character explicitly contradict a saying. He may modify it through the use of another saying or his own explanation, but competing sayings do not represent a contradiction.

Chapter Six: Qoheleth's Evaluation of Event Time

7:1-4, 5-7, 8-9, 10-12, 19-21

8:1a, 1b, 5

9:4, 17, 18

10:1, 2-3, 4, 8-9, 10, 11, 12-15, 16-20

11:1-2, 3-4, 7⁴²

This investigation is further justified by the frame narrator whose defence of Qoheleth included that he “taught the people knowledge, weighing and studying and arranging many proverbs” (12:9), and that he “sought to find pleasing words, and he wrote words of truth plainly.” If Ecclesiastes is to be read as a unity, the reader is encouraged to see Qoheleth’s presentation as positive leading toward knowledge. How do the identified sayings accord with the temporal scheme we have been developing?

The Sayings of Qoheleth: Eccl 4: 5-6, 9, 12b, 13a, 17

Both of the sayings in 4:5-6 follow the negative evaluation of progress in 4:4 as Qoheleth describes envy as the motivation behind toil. This position, however, is nuanced by the following two sayings. First, Qoheleth does not advocate laziness (v. 5).⁴³ Envy may drive work, but the sensible course of action is not to avoid work. Second, there is no need to amass (מלא חפנים) more than is required for the time (v. 6), for this type of overproduction is characterized as רעות רוח. The better course of action is to have enough but with rest.⁴⁴ Both sayings throw light on the event of work. Work in itself is neither positive nor negative, but Qoheleth tackles the motivation behind work. To amass material is a waste of effort, as we have shown, since accumulation does not provide any long-term benefit.

⁴² Johnson, “Form-Critical Analysis,” 66, 67 also identifies 1:15, 18 and 2:14a as sayings, but since these form part of the introduction of Qoheleth explored earlier in chapter 4, they are not included here.

⁴³ The relation of the two proverbs in vv. 5-6 to the statement in v. 4 is far from straight-forward. Longman III, *Ecclesiastes*, 138, in line with the thoughts of Ginsberg, *Qoheleth*, 324-25 much earlier, suggests that v. 6 is the resolution to the dichotomy between v. 4 and v. 5. Bartholomew, *Ecclesiastes*, 188 sees the contrast between v. 5 and v. 6 as indicative of the enigma of work for Qoheleth so that v. 6 does not propose a better solution to v. 5 but a suggestion that sometimes the laziness proposed in v. 5 can also be a good.

⁴⁴ Both נחל and עמל function in this case as adverbial accusatives. But see Schoors, *Preacher, Part I*, 120-121, 190 for alternative suggestions. In this case, נחל is not laziness or a minimal effort, but rather indicates that it is without harried ambition.

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We have already observed both v. 9 and v. 12b as a part of the discussion above on companionship, which we adjudicated pointed at event time. Qoheleth here points to the advantage of not being alone.

In the previous chapter we considered the saying of v. 13a with vv. 13b-16 speaking of the king and the boy. While the anecdote as a whole points toward lifespan time, what Michel has identified as the saying of v. 13a simply points out that wisdom, even in poverty, is superior to powerful folly. This statement about the superiority of wisdom should still be considered as an event time saying, however, since wisdom is the ability to act wisely and this act must take place in event time. But we further note that while the saying may promote the superiority of wisdom it isolates its value in the event time level, for as the rest of the anecdote points out, even the amazing tale of a boy coming from lowly circumstances and navigating his way to the throne does not end well for the ruler. Wisdom is of value, but only at the level of the situation helping the individual make a good decision that will yield further event time results.

The final saying of Eccl 4 does connect with the advice offered in Eccl 5, which considers those who go to the “house of God” (בֵּית הָאֱלֹהִים). Qoheleth utilizes the imperative voice to caution the reader toward careful conduct in the Temple. The comparison in this verse is the act of listening as opposed to sacrifice.⁴⁵ The sage advice is for event time insofar as it speaks of a particular situation, even though this situation may occur frequently. Its advice looks towards the best possible use of event time when one is in a religious establishment. That is, it is a good time to listen rather than giving a fool’s sacrifice.⁴⁶ There is no comparison or link with any other layer of time, but only on comparing two possible uses of event time. There is no immediate rationale for the imperative. Even as we move into 5:1 where Qoheleth urges general caution when it comes to speaking before God, the impetus is vague: “for God is in heaven, and you are upon the earth; on account of

⁴⁵ The rendering of the final clause, אֵינָם יוֹדְעִים לַעֲשׂוֹת רָע, is exceedingly difficult. Schoors, *Preacher, Part I*, 182-83 has an excellent discussion of the options. In the opinion of Fox, *Ecclesiastes*, 32 “The line has not yet been satisfactorily explained.”

⁴⁶ Again the reader is left to consider what מִתַּת הַכְּסִילִים זָבַח entails. Is it an indictment of those who would thoughtlessly enter the temple (so Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 115), or those who “show off religiosity, as fools are wont to do” (so Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 198), or excesses (so Lohfink, *Qoheleth*, 75)? Perhaps it is even an indictment of the whole sacrificial system (so Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 107 and Longman III, *Ecclesiastes*, 150).

this, let your words be few.” The rational of 5:5, where the threat is that God could destroy one's work, is discussed below.

Ecc 5:2, 6, 9-11

The saying of 5:2 concerns dreams, a theme that is taken up again in v. 7, but except for the last phrase concerning the fool, does not connect as strongly with 4:17-5:1 or 5:3-6, which all concern speech.⁴⁷ The typical interpretation of the first half of 5:2 is that hard work results in uncomfortable dreams,⁴⁸ with the second portion paralleling another useless endeavour—over speaking. The advice is shared positively as something that is beneficial for the reader to be aware of and indicates a belief in a proper attitude toward the divine. The caution in both portions seems to be overzealousness in either speech or work, just as the surrounding material urges restraint in the declaration of vows. It is only in v. 5 that the over-riding rationale for the advice is given: to placate the anger of God away from the destruction of one's work. Regarding our discussion, the scope of חבל את־מעשה ידיך is vital and debated. Should we regard מעשה ידיך as indicative of a lifetime of work, or is it something more localized.⁴⁹ The Targum, for example, understands v. 5 as a reference to a final judgement in the afterlife.⁵⁰ Leupold implies that God's

⁴⁷ Not surprisingly, Barton, *Ecclesiastes*, 123 considers it a gloss.

⁴⁸ So Bartholomew, *Ecclesiastes*, 206 and Fox, *Time to Tear Down*, 231. Leo G. Perdue, *Wisdom and Cult: A Critical Analysis of the Views of Cult in the Wisdom Literatures of Israel and the Ancient Near East*, SBLDS 30 (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1977), 184-85 suggests that the occasion that gives rise to the proverb is the worshipper who has had a terrifying dream, and he comes to the cultic priest for interpretation. Qoheleth's take is that fitful dreams come from working too hard, and that it is “neither a warning of divine displeasure nor connected to the so-called science of omenology in which dreams were seen to be signs of specific, future events.” In other words, do not get stirred up by bad dreams.

⁴⁹ For example, Whybray, *Ecclesiastes*, 95 understands this as a reference to the sweeping judgement of God that results in “financial ruin...and perhaps also illness and death.” This is absolute ruin. The approach of Longman III, *Ecclesiastes*, 155 appears to favour מעשה ידיך as a singular work. He writes “it is in the area of work that Qohelet has hope of joy in the present life. Its destruction is therefore disastrous.” Enjoyment is a function of individual acts, as we have seen, rather than the compilation of work giving the impression, without being stated explicitly, that Longman has in mind God's destruction of an individual work tit for tat. Finally, James L. Kugel, “Qoheleth and Money,” *CBQ* 51 (1989): 33-34 proposes that one should read חבל (Piel from “to ruin, destroy”) as חבל in the sense of “to impound, seize a pledge.” In this case, the work of one's hands is the possession that would be endangered by an unpaid vow and is limited to the relative value of the vow itself.

⁵⁰ Robert B. Salters, “Notes on the History of Interpretation of Koh 5,5,” *ZAW* 90 (1978): 96. The Targumist interprets the first part of the passage as “Do not make the words of your mouth vile and so bring the judgement of Gehenna upon your flesh.” Salters explains that the Hiph of חבל carries the sense of “bring punishment upon,” which the Targumist takes as the world to come and the word “flesh” refers to the physical judgement of Gehenna.

judgement is in “rendering unsuccessful whatever a man attempts. God’s blessing cannot attend such a one who so flippantly seeks to dispose of religious obligations.”⁵¹ This has a distinctly future orientation, like the Targum, and also has an extended temporal outlook toward lifespan time.

In the course of our discussion, both of these options would appear out of character for Qoheleth for whom lifespan time is unpredictable and incapable of producing meaningful results. The only positive temporal level is event time and the only means at God’s disposal to afflict human beings in a meaningful way would be at that temporal level. In our discussion of 3:17, which also speaks of God’s judgement, we noted that the judgement of God is the limitation of all things for both the righteous and the wicked. This manner of thinking about God’s judgement also fits the current verse as well. The failure to fulfill a vow brings about the retribution of God whereby God destroys one’s work, presumably somehow linked to the vow under consideration.⁵² Since the work of a lifetime is precarious enough, it would seem odd that Qoheleth would advise cautious speech as a means to preserve it. The direct intervention of God when he is offended by an unfulfilled vow fits the thought of Qoheleth better at this stage.⁵³ Qoheleth’s saying in v. 3 urges restraint in both work and words as a means of preserving the joy of the moment.

While the syntax of v. 6 is very difficult,⁵⁴ the temporal aspect is event time. Dreams and words, even many words, refer to specific actions. The link to the imperative אַתָּה־הָאֱלֹהִים יְרָא is not clear, but the imperative itself must be seen as reflective of an action given that the previous verses refer to actions that are prone to

⁵¹ Leupold, *Exposition of Ecclesiastes*, 122.

⁵² There is considerable textual support for the plural מַעֲשֵׂי, including LXX, Vulgate, Jerome and the Targum. We disagree with Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 118, however, who remarks that such a change would not affect the meaning. The use of the singular can be viewed as limiting the destruction to the unfulfilled vow in particular. The plural gives the impression of escalation rather than a tit-for-tat reciprocity.

⁵³ This being said, there is an interesting interplay with the previously presented notion of injustice. Human life abounds with injustices, but these are not met by the direct or timely (so 8:11) judgement. However, Qoheleth points out here that direct affronts to the divine have more direct repercussions. The intervention of God is swift when he is directly affronted, but delayed when wickedness involves human interaction with one another. For a discussion on the various views of God’s activity in Ecclesiastes, see chapter 1 of Mary Wai-Yi Tse, “The Concept of God in the Book of Ecclesiastes” (Ph.D, Westminster Theological Seminary, 1998).

⁵⁴ Requiring either emendation of MT to אַתָּה־יְרָא, supported by LXX, Vulgate and Syriac, or utilizing less frequent and tenuous renderings of בָּ, וָבָ, and waw, such as proposed by Gordis, *Man and His World*, 249.

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abuse. The action of the fear of God will, in the theory of Qoheleth, modify the other actions making them less likely to offend the deity.

We have already considered 5:9-11 above with respect to event time and dissatisfaction and in the previous chapter. We observed that the sayings are directed at event time urging readers to avoid the trap of accumulation as a way of achieving some lifespan advantage. Rather, the positive use of event time comes in the form of rest (v. 11) rather than excess, though there is the possibility of enjoyment in seeing the fruit of hard work (v. 11). Qoheleth's use of sayings here is to direct people away from notions of lifespan advantage through wealth toward proper use of event time.

Eccl 6:7,9

Both saying of 6:7 and 9 are directed against accumulation, though the temporal target in both cases is different. Verse 7 contemplates the impossibility of lifespan satisfaction through material means while v. 9 directs the reader toward satisfaction in event time: enjoy what you have and resist the drive to accumulate more.

Eccl 7:1-4, 5-7, 8-9, 10-12, 19-21

We have explored some of the early sayings of Eccl 7 above, related to the benefits of a good reputation. There we indicated that 7:1-2 addresses event time and the benefit of being associated with positive events, but to view life in terms of one's own mortality.

One finds in vv. 3-4 a similar set of terms, which together with v. 2 form two contrasting semantic fields; one deals with "superficial enjoyment" (בית משה, שחוק, בית שמחה) while the other deals with the "certainty of death" (בית אבל, כעס, סוף כל-האדם).⁵⁵ Verses 3-4 join with the basic notion of v. 2 as well as with its temporal setting. Grief,⁵⁶ laughter, and visits to the houses of

⁵⁵ Schoors, *Preacher, Part II*, 241.

⁵⁶ A term Schoors supports, but which Bartholomew, *Ecclesiastes*, 244 rejects claiming that the choice of כעס as "sorrow" stems ultimately from Luther's choice and may be an attempt by commentators to minimize the contradictions in the verse. Schoors, however, bases his argument on the semantic field created by the aggregate use of the terms for death and enjoyment. Bartholomew's argument stems from a desire to retain a thoroughly negative view of כעס based upon its appearance in 5:16. His justification for why a term used in Qoheleth's discussion of transitory riches (5:16) needs to be used in exactly the same way in a proverb dealing with death two chapters later is lacking.

mourning and mirth are temporally of short duration and thus classified as event time.

The כִּי at the beginning of v. 6 and v. 7 serves to tie vv. 5-7 together and allows vv. 6-7 to serve as the rationale for v. 5.⁵⁷ The main idea is the situational notion that the rebuke of the wise man is superior to the song of fools. The relative merit of different event time activities is again at issue. In Prov 17:10, the rebuke (נִעְרָת) provides correction, and serves in parallel with the notion of correcting beatings. The rebuke then provides a benefit that the song of fools is unable to provide. One may presume that this benefit is better living. Verse 6 provides a metaphor symbolizing the perhaps amusing but ultimately empty songs of the foolish person. While Krüger suggests the point of the comparison is the short duration of the crackling thorns under the pot, it seems better to view the statement from the quality of sound rather than the duration.⁵⁸ Thorns on a fire crackle and frequently pop; it is an amusing sound like listening to firecrackers.⁵⁹ But firecrackers are useless for the task of heating water, or cooking stew on the fire. So too, a species of plant such as *Sacropoterium spinosum* crackles and spits, but does not fulfill the need to providing heat for the pot.⁶⁰ In the same way, the laughter of fools is not unpleasant to the ear, but does not prove useful to the task of proper living. This task is fulfilled by the rebuke of the wise. There is a danger in this line of thinking, however. Could it lead one to believe that there is some long-term benefit (lifespan time) to listening to the rebuke of the wise? To this notion, Qoheleth provides a correction in v. 7. While the situation that gives rise to this saying is difficult to pinpoint, the general sentiment appears to be a demonstration of the limits of a wise man's rebuke. Might the rebuke stem from some indiscretion on the part of the

⁵⁷ Many commentators, however, see v. 7 as disconnected from vv. 5-6. See, for example, Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 133 who argues, based on a manuscript from Qumran that appears to have a gap between v. 6 and v. 7, that a line has dropped out. Delitzsch, *Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes*, 317 goes so far as to try and provide the first half of the verse based on Prov 16:8!

⁵⁸ Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 136. He goes on to suggest "like [thorns], the fools destroy themselves through their enjoyment." While this sort of polemic against the actions of the foolish fits Proverbs, Qoheleth's point appear to be more comparative; better on a scale rather than what is absolutely good or absolutely bad.

⁵⁹ See Ps 58:10 where a similar thought is present. As Tate, *Psalms 51-100*, 87 explains, a dry thorn bush provides almost instantaneous heat. This is not useful for a long-term source of heat.

⁶⁰ HALOT, s.v. סִיָּר, 1, which mentions this particular variety.

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wise,⁶¹ or might the circumstances limit the ability of the wise to provide apt analysis?⁶² Again, Qoheleth desires to limit the view that wisdom provides any long lasting, or lifespan, benefit to those who would undertake its pursuit, as Qoheleth suggests he did. The value of wisdom is situational helping one make proper choices in the moment. But these decisions are not cumulative; the whole is not the sum of its component parts precisely because of v.7's restrictions: circumstances remain unpredictable.

There is a consistency in Qoheleth's thought, even though the character at times offers competing versions of life. Verse 8 mirrors v. 1b, though less restricted. To bring some matter to a conclusion is better than starting. While providing no rationale for this statement, two possible explanations fit. On the one hand, having something complete leaves no further room for something to go wrong. On the other hand, in light of the next two statements which focus on patience (אֲרֵךְ-יָיוֹחַ and אֶל-תְּבַהֵל), the statement can indicate that the end of a matter is superior to the beginning precisely because the anxiety caused by the incident is decreased. On its own, both senses are equally valid, though in the context the second is to be preferred.

Temporally, v. 8a is broadly cast. It could refer just as easily to lifespan time (i.e., death) as to the latest sporting contest occupying event time. The “indulgent of spirit” of v. 8b, isolates the statement in event time. Since the demonstration of patience is, by definition, bound to an event, we are dealing with event time. It is better to have something completed than to be in the midst of it, but in both circumstances patience is better than smug satisfaction. Only the end of a matter provides the evidence necessary to make judgments on the success or failure of a task. As he will observe further in 9:11, it is impossible to pre-judge events, or to understand their outcome until they have ended. Verse 9 forms a suitable parallel to v. 8 though now in the form of an imperative rather than an observation.

The event of 7:10 concerns itself with reflection, to which Qoheleth urges restraint. We have previously considered the הַיָּמִים הָרַאשֻׁנִּים as indicative of

⁶¹ So Fox, *Ecclesiastes*, 45 agreeing with the NJPSV rendering, “for cheating may rob the wise man of reason.”

⁶² So Bartholomew, *Ecclesiastes*, 248 who renders v. 7 as “For oppression makes a wise person foolish, and a bribe destroys the heart.”

generation time and since comparison of ages does not and indeed cannot provide useful patterns to understand how to act in event time of the present, reflection of this sort is denigrated. Similarly, generation time is in view for vv. 11-12 where the possession of wisdom stands in comparison to the inheritance of money. The movement of wisdom from one generation to another is viewed positively. Wisdom is beneficial only to the living, however, as יִתֵּן לְרֵאשִׁי הַשְּׂמֶשׁ reminds the reader. The originator of wisdom is not praise, but the recipient of wisdom is assisted. As v. 13 will go on to exclaim, wisdom does not have the ability to change or adapt the work of God at any rate.

The benefit of wisdom is again highlighted in 7:19. Wisdom's ability surpasses administrative ability allowing more profitable decisions at the opportune time. But v. 20 somewhat subverts that notion suggesting that over lifespan time no one is able to make every decision properly.⁶³ Wisdom is beneficial, again, but it is hardly perfect. The goal, for Qoheleth, is not some preconceived notion of the perfect life. The benefit of everything being limited is that mistakes do not generally lead to utter hopelessness (though see 5:13-16).

Not surprisingly, Qoheleth seems to advise selective hearing (v. 21) as a part of the wisdom enterprise since he has already encouraged the reader to shun the song and laughter of fools (7:5, 6). The motivation, however, is not the same as tuning out the fool embrace the saying of the wise. Rather, it is simply to avoid the unkindness of others. Certainly this advice is directed at event time though the motivation for not concerning oneself with the servant's cursing is difficult to detect.

Eccl 8:1a, 1b, 5

Most scholars presume that 8:1a is a negative expression following on the footsteps of 7:23-24 meaning that the achievement of becoming a wise individual is ultimately out of reach.⁶⁴ As Ogden rightly maintains, however, it "defies logic" to suggest that 8:1aα means that no one can be like a wise man. How could one be like

⁶³ Schoors, *Preacher, Part II*, 228 suggests that, given its parallel to the moral term מִטְבָּ, a moral sense should be understood here. But see Backhaus, *Zeit und Zufall*, 440. Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 141 acknowledges that either the ethical or the profane sense of the term may apply.

⁶⁴ Fox, *Time to Tear Down*, 272, Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 290, and others emend MT מִי כִּי־חָכָם as מִי כִּי־חָכָם following Aquila, Vulgate and the LXX, which is itself corrupted. Many suggest keeping the more difficult reading of the MT, including Goldman (BHQ, 97*). Keeping MT requires it to be a rhetorical question expecting a negative answer ("No one is wise").

something that does not exist? The difficulty is that this would require the question of v. 1a β to expect a positive response, which is not the case in most of Qoheleth's previous מ' questions. So, one must allow either that v. 1a α is nonsensical, or that v. 1a β is a unique expression for Qoheleth. Without resorting to emendation, the second possibility is more satisfactory.⁶⁵ There is also a certain consistency in logic to the statement if viewed through the lens of temporality as we have been developing. The question מ' יודע פשר דבר can refer to event time (דבר)—an isolated occurrence. In this case, Qoheleth would agree that it is possible to understand or appreciate the meaning of an event. What Qoheleth would shy away from is the claim that a series of events can be shaped into an understanding of lifespan time or generation time.

This understanding would allow a more positive rendering of v. 1b than Seow's suggestion that one's animosity should be hidden from a ruler.⁶⁶ Rather, it would become a positive statement that wisdom, the ability to make prudent choices in event time, provides the user with a positive outlook once the link between event time and lifespan time is broken. The ability to understand an event is a cause for pleasure just as an apt word might be (cf. Prov 15:23).

The saying of v. 5 is toward obedience, though it certainly cannot mean absolute obedience to every command. In this context it refers specifically to the command of the king. Throughout vv. 2-4, Qoheleth considers the case of an individual, perhaps the wise man from v. 1, facing a difficult situation caused by the order of the king. Qoheleth's advice is to obey the king, which leads to profit in the short term (v. 5a) with the understanding that the short duration of events (v. 5b) makes even unpleasant situations manageable. If event time is the only time period under our control, then it is wise to deal with the immediate situation in a utilitarian fashion (cf. 7:16-17), since the consequences of a certain action in the long term are unknowable (8:7-8).

⁶⁵ Bartholomew, *Ecclesiastes*, 280 also suggests that 8:1 “articulates the traditional wisdom perspective, according to which the wise person is unique in knowing the interpretation of a word, a thing, or a matter.”

⁶⁶ Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 291.

Eccl 9:4, 17, 18

The saying contained in v. 4 suggests there is a value to life: a living dog is better than a dead lion. In other locations, Qoheleth speaks of admiration for the dead, but these come in the context of oppression (4:2) or in comparison between the start or completion of life's journey and the uncertainty it brings (7:1). Qoheleth's positive evaluation of life in 9:4, however, stands in opposition to those previous statements, especially that of 7:1, for it is the certainty of perpetual nothingness in death that drives the saying that life is superior to death. Living has possibilities while death has none. This proverb informs our discussion of horizons of time little, to remind the reader that the project of Ecclesiastes is not to advocate death, but a proper orientation to life. This new orientation occurs in the advice to youth (11:9-10) and the conclusion (12:9-14) as well as the exhortations to enjoyment.

The sayings concerning the benefits of the words of the wise in 9:17-18 come out of the context of the anecdote regarding the poor, wise man in vv. 13-16. The opening contrast is between a small city with few men that was besieged by a great king who built siegeworks against it.⁶⁷ Debate surrounds the interpretation of these verses: is **וּמִצָּא** to be understood as an impersonal statement, or does it refer to the king; is **וּמִלֵּט** to be understood as an unreal condition, or as a recollection of what happened, if the account indeed identifies a real event? Opinions vary widely among commentators. Perhaps the most convincing line, despite the difficulties, is that **וּמִצָּא** has the king as its subject,⁶⁸ and **וּמִלֵּט** expressing a real situation.⁶⁹ This overcomes the difficulty of **וּמִצָּא** suddenly introducing an impersonal subject when the previous verbs (**וַיִּבְנֶה**, **וַיִּסְבֵּב**, **וַיִּבֶּא**) refer to the king.⁷⁰ It also prevents the objection raised by Fox that if the ability of the wise man is only theoretical ("he could have saved the city"), a reader would immediately wonder how Qoheleth could have that knowledge.⁷¹ There are very few certainties in Ecclesiastes except that the memory of people is incredibly short (1:11), and Qoheleth concludes "Yet no one

⁶⁷ For a discussion of **מִצָּא** see Schoors, *Preacher, Part II*, 361-62.

⁶⁸ So, for example, Ehrlich, *Randglossen zur hebräischen Bibel*, 7, 95-96.

⁶⁹ So Fox, *Time to Tear Down*, 299 and Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 178.

⁷⁰ The objection asking how the great king found the poor, wise man in the city yet at the same time the man managed to deliver the city is not convincing. The two other cases of **מִלֵּט** in Ecclesiastes (7:26; 8:8) refer to delivering from destruction and not simply capture. The description of the razing of captured cities, or slaughtering of inhabitants, is not uncommon in the Hebrew Bible.

⁷¹ Fox, *Ecclesiastes*, 66.

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remembered that poor man.” The deed was remembered, but not the name of the deliverer, which Qoheleth himself does not even mention.

In light of the previous statements that event time can destroy the designs of the past and the visions of the future, Qoheleth's illustration highlights that wisdom can work in event time to bring about a good result. However, this good result does not build something greater for the bearer of wisdom and he is forgotten.

This leads Qoheleth to the sayings vv. 17-18. Wisdom is valuable and makes a greater contribution than even a ruler's shouts, if those shouts are made among fools. But as v. 18 goes on to say, the value of wisdom is great, but one “bungler” (חוטא) can undo what wisdom has built. Though the phrases do not directly compare horizons of time, within them one can see that temporal observations are at the root of the statements. Wisdom is beneficial (vv. 16a, 17) but it is of limited value to raise the poor man from his poverty (v. 16a) or to prevent one misbehaving individual from wreaking havoc (v. 18). The underlying impression of vv. 14-18 is of the event time value of wisdom, but this cannot be expected to be of long-term value.

Ecc 10:1, 2-3, 4, 8-9, 10, 11, 12-15, 16-20

The first saying of Ecc 10 regards flies in a perfumer's ointment. There are a number of issues surrounding the expression זבובי מות including the use of the singular verb with a plural subject and the apparent asyndeton of מחכמה מכבוד (“wisdom and honour”). These are approached in different ways in the commentaries, but Fox is quite right when he notes, “There are several difficulties in this verse, and the solutions are all conjectural. But the image of a fly spoiling ointment sets up the ratio for fools and wisdom, so that the gist of the verse is clear: a little folly can undo much wisdom.”⁷² The vulnerability of wisdom in the face of folly is at issue.⁷³ The temporal question is surely at the centre of the thought here. Qoheleth continues to confess the benefit of wisdom, but only as beneficial in the moment of its use and not as a suitable tool to construct something lasting and valuable. It is at the height of irony that Qoheleth uses קָר here to describe “a little folly.” It is used both to describe something weighty, as well as something

⁷² Fox, *Time to Tear Down*, 301.

⁷³ Bartholomew, *Ecclesiastes*, 317.

precious.⁷⁴ The use of קֶרֶן in the description of folly not only points to the relative effect of folly compared to wisdom, but is an undermining of the preciousness of wisdom in its ability to produce any long lasting effect.

Again, Qoheleth never derides the whole of the wisdom enterprise, but here wisdom is not simply making the right choice but it is associated with “honour.” It is thus the reputation of wisdom surrounding an individual that is at issue, and this reputation for wise conduct can be undone with a single act of folly. The next number of proverbial sayings and observations fit into this mould. While the wise man and the fool may share the same ultimate fate, in life they take different directions at any particular moment (v. 2). The acerbic tone of v. 3 suggests that the way of the fool is inferior. Verse 4 demonstrates the way a wise person would handle the event of a ruler's anger and the good result.⁷⁵ There is little doubt that in event time, wisdom provides the better result than folly.⁷⁶

Qoheleth turns to the unpredictability of life as a further factor mitigating against the long-term success of any skill or ability, including wisdom. Circumstances appear to operate against human progress whether because of unintended accident (vv. 8-9) or because of a lack of activity to undo the effects of entropy (v. 10), or a lack of timely application of skill (v. 11). That there is somehow a golden key to future success is a vaporous sentiment not supported by Qoheleth's own observations.

⁷⁴ It is used to describe the stones of Solomon's temple, where the comparison is surely on size and strength rather than pure material value. DeVries, *1 Kings*, 83 suggests that the reference to “costly” looks at labour cost since the stones “were not simply found in a field.” In the Solomon narrative, however, among the gifts of the Queen of Sheba were “one hundred twenty talents of gold, a great quantity of spices, and precious stones.” The emphasis here is upon their value rather than sheer size.

⁷⁵ Cf. Prov 14:30, which speaks of the value of calmness and the relative difficulty of jealousy.

⁷⁶ But the world Qoheleth invites his readers to encounter is not a world where wisdom can produce a lasting effect and folly receives its just reward. Qoheleth again introduces the notion of injustice into the equation (v. 5). This he describes as an “evil that I have seen under the sun” further qualified by the noun שִׁגְגָה, indicating that the consequences of the action were not foreseen. Cf. Jacob Milgrom, “The Cultic שִׁגְגָה and its influence in Psalms and Job,” *JQR* 58 (1967): 118 where he suggests that “inadvertence” may be a suitable English equivalent, though its use in v. 5 would require a substantive: “as an inadvertent act.” The act with unforeseen consequences in v. 6 involves elevating a fool to a position of honour without due consideration of ability. The contrast is to that of the “rich man.” The assumption here appears to be that rich men are made according to their ability, but high positions are not afforded them. So a ruler upsets what could be considered the “natural order.” This ability of humans to upset the natural order demonstrates that while wisdom is beneficial in event time, it guarantees nothing.

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The theme of speech occupies central place in vv. 12-15. Speech is an event and the speech of the wise and the fool are contrasted with a view to highlighting the benefit of speaking wisely. The key feature of the wise is the knowledge of when to stop. The brevity of the wise, which brings favour, stands in stark contrast to the fool whose words bring harm and become numerous. The second portion of v. 14, however, is tied only loosely to the speech of fools, and could have two functions. On the one hand, it could be directed at the fool reminding the reader that no one, especially the fool, knows the future. On the other hand, one can see it as a critical comment and a subversion against all speech, even that of the wise in v. 12.⁷⁷ Since Qoheleth has elsewhere raised the objection that the future is uncertain and not even the wise can know (8:7, 17), the criticism of v. 14b cannot be limited to the fool alone. However, that does not imply that the criticism is levelled at the wise of v. 12 and may instead suggest that wise speech contains, besides brevity, a restraint that does not seek to overstep what can be assured. The wise know how to use speech in event time to their advantage without assuming knowledge of lifespan time. The fool, however, is unable to restrain either length or comprehensiveness.

Folly is again denigrated in v. 15, but again as an event. The fool does not know how to find his way to town indicating the level of his incompetence in matters of commerce and social interaction.⁷⁸

The typical wisdom contrast between two paths is utilized with respect to the monarch in vv. 16-17. The land is at risk when the king is a נַעַר and the other officials feast rather than govern. There may be in the implication that the inexperienced or underclass⁷⁹ king will not be able to keep his officials in line, while one of proper lineage knows how to get the job done. As we have already seen, the proverb applauds leaders who act in the interest of the land and not in their own self-interest. The sayings raise the question of character, which then determines how kings and nobleman act.

⁷⁷ Bartholomew, *Ecclesiastes*, 325 suggests this line along with Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 186-87.

⁷⁸ Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 320. Seow, using the assumption of widespread urbanization, notes, "The way to the city is, therefore, common knowledge; everyone except the most stupid and incompetent knows the way to town."

⁷⁹ If נַעַר refers to the social status of the individual rather than age. Longman III, *Ecclesiastes*, 249 prefers a reference to age while Ogden, *Qoheleth*, 191 opts for the class distinction "servant."

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The proverb on sloth occupying v. 18 may be read as a political statement connected with vv. 16-17, but that is not strictly necessary.⁸⁰ Sloth is a negative attribute since it does not make use of event time. Roofs need to be maintained on a regular basis to prevent seepage. The references to wine, bread (“feasts”),⁸¹ and money in v. 19 ring familiar with other passages arguing for the value of rejoicing. If v. 19 is understood as a positive statement, then it again elevates eating and drinking and having the resources to “keep busy.”⁸² Positive evaluation of event time is consistent with Qoheleth’s position.⁸³ That there is a tension in vv. 16-19 is not surprising in a work full of tensions. Enjoyment is presented as the highest good, but Qoheleth nowhere suggests it is the only good. Thus, enjoyment with eating and drinking is good (v. 19), but so is seeing the good in one’s toil, which the nobles of v. 16 do not experience as they feast inopportunistly.

The advice to avoid criticism of the king or the rich is again profitable in event time. Qoheleth is not concerned about larger social ills (see 5:7) though certain societal situations are better than others (10:16-17). As the parable of 9:15-16 has already stressed, even the right course of action or thought is not necessarily rewarded. So keeping oneself in the best possible relation with positions of power is a prudent event time consideration, and is consistent with the larger movement of Ecclesiastes.

⁸⁰ Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 340 suggests that the “house” of v. 18 could refer to a dynasty or kingly line. The slothfulness represented in the negative lifestyle of the elite in v. 16 can bring about royal loss. While this would connect the thought of these verses, it would make these verses out of step with the temporal orientation of the remainder of the book that shows a disconnect between event time and *lifespan* or generation time. Even noble kings are not able to ascertain what will transpire during their reigns.

⁸¹ TDOT, s.v. חֶלֶב, suggests that this is an extrapolated meaning due to the centrality of bread at celebratory gatherings.

⁸² Following Fox, *Time to Tear Down*, 310 and Schoors, *Preacher, Part II*, 432 who translate as a Hiphil in the same line as the participle in 5:19.

⁸³ Though we would not, as with Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 188-89, connect v. 19 with vv. 16-17, his analysis is insightful. He states that v. 19 serves a “satirical intention” to suggest that while v. 17 presents a better situation than v. 16, both are relativized in light of v. 19. “The conditions of dominion described in v. 17 have their (relative) advantage over that described in v. 16 and are not disputed by v. 19; rather, it is disputed that v. 17 describes an ideal condition.” This scenario provides an alternate reading that would also fit with the overall temporal scheme devised in this work.

Eccl 11:1-2, 3-4, 7

The sayings of 11:1-2 have already been examined as to its use of לַחֵם in v. 1 and various interpretive possibilities associated with this use. The temporal expression בְּרֶגֶעַ הַיָּמִים has also been examined and found to indicate a temporal span measured in terms of days rather than a metaphoric referent to some longer span of time. Just as chapter 10 ended, Qoheleth is dealing here with an event, or rather a series of two events separated by an indeterminate length. Generosity is encouraged with the possibility that in another context (event) it will bring back good fortune. One must ask whether the expression הַמִּצְאָנוּ is a certainty or a possibility, and we agree with many commentators that what Qoheleth presents is a possibility that provides a motive for generosity.⁸⁴ Certainty would be uncharacteristic of Qoheleth's thought.

While the sayings refer to event time, the overarching rationale for the sage advice comes from the expression לֹא תִדַּע מַה־יְהִיָּה רַעָה עַל־הָאָרֶץ. While the רַעָה here is almost certainly an event, the notion of looking forward is in the realm of lifespan time. While perhaps self-serving, the advice to act generously is placed in the context of an unknowable and, therefore, frightening lifespan time that cannot be harnessed or controlled.

Qoheleth manages then to fix on various certainties in normal human existence only to undercut these by taking away an individual's ability to understand the timing of these events. Yes, it rains when clouds are full (v. 3), but ascertaining when the clouds are full is unavailable to human beings. The one who watches in great earnestness to anticipate the “when” will spend his or her time in vain (v. 4). The mystery that Qoheleth perceives as impenetrable he attributes to מַעֲשֵׂה הָאֱלֹהִים.

The final identified saying (v. 7) is a positive affirmation of life once again: “Sweet is the light, and it is good for the eyes to see the sun.” While much of Qoheleth's musings are conflicting, twisted, and in some way irreverent, he does point his hearer toward embracing the pleasures available in the moment. Of course,

⁸⁴ Bartholomew, *Ecclesiastes*, 334 specifically makes mention of the modal potential of the imperfect, though others assume it as a possibility.

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this affirmation comes as a transition to the exhortation to youth to be mindful of the coming darkness.⁸⁵

Summary

We have examined portions of Ecclesiastes identified as “sayings” in order to determine how the temporal scheme we have developed coincides with the presentation of wisdom material.

Broadly, we have discovered two categories of sayings. First, there are those sayings that focus on event time and advocates wisdom or proper conduct. For example, 4:13a, “Better a poor lad and wise from a king old and foolish,” or 7:19, “Wisdom gives more strength to the wise than ten rulers who are in a city.” The majority of the sayings in Qoheleth would fall into this category.

Second, there are those irreverent sayings that seem to run contrary to what could be called conventional wisdom, but fit Qoheleth’s wisdom due to the temporal scheme he has been advocating. For example, “Better is a handful of rest than two handfuls of toil, and striving for wind.” Since accumulation is not profitable long-term, rest with something in hand is preferable. Further examples are 7:7 “For oppression makes foolish a wise man, and a bribe destroys the heart” or 9:18 “Wisdom is better than weapons of battle, but one sinner destroys much good.” Here, wisdom is far from the unquestionable principle that results in long-term profit. It may work at the level of event time but not at a higher temporal level.⁸⁶

This suggests that Qoheleth’s view of time has affected how he advocates for wisdom and its benefits. He does not deny a benefit to wise action, but casts significant doubt upon its ultimate result. Qoheleth describes wisdom as a stop on his journey toward understanding the human condition (1:13-18), and it continued to inform his search even after he discounted it as the final answer (2:3). Wisdom did not provide the answer, though Qoheleth recognized that it was the better choice when compared to folly. As Laumann has noted, “Everything has relevancy and

⁸⁵ Dulin, “‘How Sweet Is the Light’: Qoheleth’s Age-Centered Teachings” highlights the movement between the brightness of the sun in 11:7 and the increasing levels of darkness in 12:1-8.

⁸⁶ To use the terminology of Maryta Laumann, “Qoheleth and Time,” *TBT* 27 (1989): 307, Qoheleth does not advocate “inherited security” for anything, including wisdom.

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effectiveness for only a limited time and situation, depending on the particular circumstances.”⁸⁷ This includes wisdom.

The frame-narrator upholds Qoheleth as a teacher of knowledge and a framer of sayings. That the reader is to view Qoheleth as a sage and advocate for, and teacher of, wisdom is beyond doubt. For Qoheleth, however, wisdom is susceptible to the same degrading temporal effects as the human condition, and his work makes the reader acutely aware of the limitations he sees imposed upon wisdom by the movement of time.

Conclusions Concerning Event Time

The expression *carpe diem* comes to us through one of the Odes of Horace (1.11), who advises his friend Leuconoe *carpe diem, quam minimum credula postero*. In the Ode, it is suggested that the verb *carpe* picks up on the image of pruning from the *resecas* and suggests the image of plucking a grape.⁸⁸ This is not violent imagery, but suggests grasping for utility. In the context of the Ode, this utility is brought about because information on length of life is unavailable to human beings. The best course, then, is to make the best of what is available without basing one's plans to any great extent on an uncertain future.

Carpe diem is often used as a descriptor of the philosophy put forth in Ecclesiastes, at least to express the core of the Qoheleth material.⁸⁹ But while Horace's short ode advocates a life of pleasure in the midst of the uncertain future, the philosophy of Ecclesiastes is more fully nuanced encompassing a search for meaning in life and considering the full breadth of birth, death, joy and injustice through empirical observation and dialogue with experience. But time and again, Ecclesiastes, through the voice of the Teacher Qoheleth, points the reader to the moments of life to consider the implications of “there is a time.”

In this chapter we have undertaken an extended examination of those passages and sayings that focus the reader upon moments and situations for which

⁸⁷ Maryta Laumann, “Qoheleth and Time,” 306.

⁸⁸ Daniel H. Garrison, *Horace: Epodes and Odes, A New Annotated Latin Edition*, Okalahoma Series in Classical Culture 10 (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 229.

⁸⁹ Bartholomew, *Ecclesiastes*, 80-83 holds that these *carpe diem* passages, juxtaposed to the expressions of לָבָא, stand at the centre of the interpretive puzzle in Ecclesiastes.

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we have employed the term event time as a descriptor. We demonstrated that Qoheleth characterized event time as having the potential to be either positive or negative. We can place negative characterizations of event time in two categories: those that are controllable and those that are not. Wickedness and oppression are part of life's fabric under the sun. This should not come as a surprise (5:7) to the reader for human institutions promote tyranny with rulers looking after other rulers, and kings being able to do as they please (8:3-4). But there are some aspects of event time that are controllable. Dissatisfaction brought about by a desire to keep rather than use wealth (5:12), or to live in competition (4:4) for some unobtainable prize is absurd. Similarly, the desire to reflect and makes sense of the whole (5:19; 7:10) is accounted as improper use of event time, as no amount of reflection can illuminate a world where the results of skill and ability, including wisdom, is not predictable (8:14; 9:11).

In this regard, Qoheleth's reflection in 9:12 is particularly important. The use of עת has already been discussed. There is no reason to suggest that in the context of v. 11 that it refers specifically to death, though this is a frequent opinion.⁹⁰ Instead, the expressions לֹאֵת רַעַה and עֵתוֹ refer to any situation, including death, that brings hopes and plans to a premature end.⁹¹ The time frame is certainly event time as the characterization of these events is רַעַה. Qoheleth gives his clearest indication that no one can anticipate changes in fortune and this unpredictability frustrates any attempt of human beings to plan and cast visions of the future.

Event time, however, is not characterized negatively throughout Ecclesiastes. There are a number of positive depictions of how humans may profitably use event time and the examples given are in the realms of companionship (4:9-12), rest and peace (4:6; 5:11), and the oft repeated exhortation to experience enjoyment in eating, drinking, and finding pleasure in and as a result of toil. Qoheleth never advocates

⁹⁰ See, for example, Barton, *Ecclesiastes*, 164, Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 165, Fox, *Ecclesiastes*, 65, Longman III, *Ecclesiastes*, 233, and Ogden, *Qoheleth*, 170.

⁹¹ So described by Ernst Elster, *Commentar über den Prediger Salomo*, (Göttingen: Dieterich, 1855), 114, "Seine Zeit is nicht speciell auf die Todesstunde zu beziehen, wie Vulg.: nescit homo finem suum, sondern es sind ellgemeiner darunter alle die Momente zu verstehen, die desonders entscheidend sind für das Lebensschicksal des Einselnen. Diese Ungewissheit des Menschen bei seiner völligen Abhängigkeit wird durch Vergleichen versinnbildlicht. Wie die Fische und Vögel blindlings in die Gefahr stürzen, die Netz und Schlinge ihnen bereiten, so gehen auch die Menschen unbewusst den Krisen ihres Schicksals entgegen." Also Bartholomew, *Ecclesiastes*, 306, Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 175, Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 321, Schwienhorst-Schönberger, *Kohelet*, 473, and Schoors, *Preacher, Part II*, 116-17 would hold similar positions.

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nothing but these activities—as does Horace's Ode 1.11—but that one's lifespan time contain a good amount of these while they are available.

The true value of wisdom, as it is presented in various sections of Ecclesiastes, is to enable and encourage choices that will result in opportunity to experience companionship (e.g., 7:1), rest and peace (e.g., 4:4; 8:2-6; 10:8-11), and enjoyment. Wisdom is of value for the present moment, and the wise realize that a way to connect individual actions to long-term results is not within human capability no matter the level of wisdom and discernment one obtains (e.g., 8:17). What we have termed generation time and nature's time are solely in the hands of God. While this is frequently a source of frustration in Ecclesiastes, its validity is the result of keen observation and investigation.

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The reader of Ecclesiastes who quietly sits down to soak in its wisdom quickly finds that the material seemingly supports a gamut of positions from libertinism to conservative orthodoxy. This variety within the book has led some scholars, especially in the burgeoning days of the historical-critical method, to posit a series of editors and redactors in order to fit the various pieces of the Ecclesiastes puzzle into a sensible, if not quite unified, whole.

The lack of manuscript evidence and the growing discomfort with the partitioning of works, in general, and Ecclesiastes, in particular, has led to a creative development whereby the unity of the majority of the work could be maintained. A proviso of this position often posits that the character of Qoheleth himself made use of a variety of sources, with whom he entered into dialogue to show the folly of their methods. The change in nomenclature meant that rather than isolating a conservative glossator, scholars isolated the conservative sayings embedded in Ecclesiastes in order to demonstrate how his empirical epistemology shows the lack of consistency within other positions. Even in this case, however, the epilogue of the work still acts as a corrective to the scathing critiques of Qoheleth and places it more squarely in an orthodox position with respect to other canonical writings.

The tensions within the work are apparent, and any attempt to treat the work without noting the contradictions, tensions, and ambiguities quite simply fails to do justice to the subtleties and nuances of this enigmatic work. But earlier methods of reading that have isolated heavy-handed redaction or extended critical dialogue with imaginary partners have arrived at these methods by elevating certain material as “normative” while subjugating other material to the place of secondary or “outsider” status. Once this task has been accomplished, appealing to authentic versus inauthentic voices eased tensions. While this is one method, this project considers whether there is an alternative approach that accounts for the tensions from within the worldview of the work itself rather than the separation of alternate worldviews present within the text.

The task here has been to consider a method of reading Ecclesiastes through a sustained engagement with the theme of time. We have justified this engagement by noting that time lexemes, including **עַתָּה** and **יּוֹם**, are pervasive and that the introductory passage, 1:1-11, introduces temporal themes through the contrast

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between דור and ארץ. Temporal themes are further compounded through the criticism that generational memory fails as future communities will not connect with previous generations through memory (v. 11). Time confronts the reader at the book's opening, and this project seeks to ascertain how this engagement continues through the remainder.

The engagement with temporal themes began in Part One through an exegetical investigation of the lexemes and expressions most closely associated with time. Chapter two considered the lexemes עת and יום in their contexts as a way of isolating patterns of usage. We paid particular attention to any contextual hints with respect to the duration or aspect of the lexeme in question, and discovered that the consistent feature of עת throughout its uses was not the notion of “appointed time” but the limited duration. “Appointed time” does not fit the usage of עת at all in 7:17, 9:8, 11, and 12, but all the cases of עת manifest the nuance of a limited, temporally distinct time. This stands in contrast to the broad use of יום, which occurs in a number of different constructions. The use of יום in the singular corresponds to twenty-four hour periods or periods of daylight. The use of יום in the plural has no specific temporal range and can occur in passages that refer to time periods within life (e.g., “in many days” 11:1; “days of your youth” 11:9), to the whole of an individual's life (e.g., “the number of days of their life” 2:3; “days of life which God gives to him” 8:15), or to the time of generations future and past (e.g., “already in the coming days, everything will be forgotten” 2:16; “why is it that the former days were better than these” 7:10). In Ecclesiastes, יום functions as a flexible temporal lexeme, much as English speakers use the word “time.”

The examination of time lexemes and expressions continued in chapter three with an investigation of less frequently occurring temporal words such as דור, עולם, שנה, and זכרון/זכר. We found conventional meanings of “generation” for דור and “year” as the passing of seasons for שנה acceptable to their contexts. More significant for the examination of temporal themes were the contexts in which עולם and זכרון/זכר occurred. In 1:10-11 and 2:16, עולם and זכרון occur together pointing toward the inability of human communities to preserve a memorial to previous generations. A similar notion, though only with עולם and not זכרון/זכר, occurs in 9:6 where strongly held attributes such as “love” and “hate” have no further effect following death. This reminds the reader, again, that part of the struggle Ecclesiastes addresses is the passing of time and its effects.

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Overall, the exploration of lexemes and expressions for time reaffirmed the centrality of temporal observations in Ecclesiastes. But the lexical investigation also revealed that Ecclesiastes observes the effects of time on more than one level. The work sometimes addresses long durations of time (עולם) and at others confines the scope of investigation to only an individual's life upon the earth, or even a situation encountered. We were led, then, to consider whether the horizons of time itself provides a means to engage Ecclesiastes. Does an awareness of whether a verse, or a combination of verses, points to an immediate situation, or to a temporally distant event help the reader to navigate the message of Ecclesiastes? Does a sustained engagement with time assist the reader to appropriate the judgement of the frame-narrator that Qoheleth "taught knowledge," "arranged proverbs," and "wrote words of truth honestly"? The consideration of horizons of time in Ecclesiastes became the focus of Part Two.

The exploration of rhetoric by other scholars directed us to the central importance of 1:1-2:26 as the thematic entry point for reading Ecclesiastes. Chapter three gave careful consideration to the encounter with time by noting where the work places the temporal focus of the reader. We discovered that the temporal focus between limited duration events and long enduring patterns changes rapidly in the various passages, but that some consistency could be detected. In the frame-narrator's introduction of 1:1-11, the permanence of nature both in the immobility of the earth, the constant cycles of the wind, sun, rivers, and human sensory encounters (sight, hearing)¹ stands in stark contrast to the movement of דור, which is unidirectional as it moves across the stage of time rather than in circuits around it. We affixed the term nature's time to those permanent structures and generation time to the passing of human lives. These two horizons of time are juxtaposed in order to highlight the human battle with time. Humans encounter it, and are cognizant of it, given that humans are aware that others have previously existed (v. 11), but are unable to discover or produce anything new in the world. The constancy of the sphere of human activity is unaffected by human activity itself.

The introduction of Qoheleth's own search emerges in 1:12 and proceeds as far as 2:16. The remainder of Eccl 2 offers reflections on this search. The empiricist Qoheleth describes his life's activity resulting in our designation of lifespan time.

¹ Eventually the gullet will be added to this list in 6:7.

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The description of this lifespan, however, proceeds as a list of events and situations in which Qoheleth engaged, justifying the designation event time. One of the key turning points in Qoheleth's introduction is the movement from the consideration of his actions in event time toward a reflection upon the whole (2:10-11). The conclusion that his work was *הבל* and that there was no possibility for "advantage" in life under the sun was the direct result of reflecting on lifespan time. Qoheleth goes on to consider what effect generation time will have upon his works (2:16) with the result that Qoheleth hated life (2:17) due to his self-assurance that he, like all others, will be forgotten.

Together the introductions of the frame-narrator and Qoheleth offered four horizons of time: *nature's time*, *generation time*, *lifespan time* and *event time*. Ecclesiastes does not offer a systematic exploration of these horizons, but our contention is that attention to these horizons in the introductory material assists the reader to see the root of the negativity portray of life. The absurdity of life stems from the interplay of event time with the larger horizons of time. The frame-narrator poses the temporal problem of human forgetfulness in general, while Qoheleth's empirical investigation demonstrates that while event time can be pleasing and useful, these events cannot be constructed into something of enduring profitability. Into this discussion, death becomes that transition point beyond which effort and memory fade.

Chapters five and six further this investigation by viewing the remainder of Ecclesiastes through the temporal horizons observed in chapter 4 in order to determine further the characteristics of these temporal horizons and how they work together. Chapter five targets the greater durations of time: nature's, generation and lifespan. We discovered that Qoheleth presents nature's time differently than the frame-narration for whereas nature's time in the frame-narration designates permanency in natural bodies and cycles, the permanent structures in the Qoheleth material reside in the work of God. Nevertheless, we retained the title nature's time as the work of God is given the same long-enduring and immovable status as the earth and natural cycles in 1:1-11. This temporal level continues to be inaccessible and beyond human influence throughout Ecclesiastes.

Chapter five also addresses generation time, which retains a negative characterization. The passage of time from generation to generation demonstrates none of the human progress that Qoheleth associates with profit. The future as

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represented through generation time is opaque and unpredictable: “For who can declare to a human what will be after him under the sun?” (6:12b). Not only is the future unpredictable, but also nothing of an individual survives death, at least in a personal way. Both 9:1 and 9:6 refer to the “love” and “hate” of human beings, and in both cases even the deepest connections to life are lost in death so that there is no continued portion of the dead with the living.

As we regressed in the exploration of temporality in Ecclesiastes to lifespan time, we laid a foundation explaining why generation time is unaffected by human life. Humans cannot utilize or fashion lifespan time according to some preconceived design. Accumulation is useless on its own since it relies on generation time to provide lasting profit, and this is unpredictable. One positive benefit to accumulation is, potentially, if there is an heir, but Qoheleth never directly addresses this situation. The only other benefit is to see the accumulation as a good in itself. While this has some value, in light of a saying such as 4:6, “Better is a handful of rest than two handfuls of toil, and striving for wind” it is doubtful whether the reader is invited to consider the benefit of observing accumulation as worth the effort.

Ecclesiastes also critiques notions of progress, and these are included in lifespan time. Those abilities and attributes that are considered positive, such as wisdom, righteousness, or even humanity itself, are seen to be no more advantageous over the long-term than folly, wickedness and bestiality. We noted that Qoheleth never calls into question the value of wisdom, or of righteousness, or humanity. After all, it is good to see the sun. But those things are not the means to some end. And the subtle suggestion remains that perhaps those things are good in and of themselves without the hope of some future reward. The idea of progress is intimately tied to death in Ecclesiastes, but it would be false to suggest that death itself is the sole enemy it is often made out to be in Ecclesiastes.² It is rather the effect that death brings: forgetfulness. And it is this forgetfulness that stops progress.

There are certain ironies in the idea of forgetfulness that should not be lost on the reader.³ Qoheleth’s anecdote regarding the poor, wise man of 9:13-15 stands out.

² So we must disagree with the conclusions of Ogden, “Qoheleth IX 1-16,” 168-69 that it is the commonality of death that is Qoheleth’s fundamental problem.

³ Just as Bartholomew, *Ecclesiastes*, 257 advocates an awareness of irony in 7:19-22. Qoheleth advocates, “Do not give your heart to all the words they speak”. Bartholomew notes “There is, of course, some irony in Qoheleth ending his discussion of moderation in this way. If no one’s words can be fully trusted, then why should we listen to him? He is, as it were, hoist upon his own petard.”

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Here the narrator has an opportunity to put this man's wisdom on display for all ages, and yet all that remains is an anonymous account of the actions of some wise man, somewhere. But this pales in comparison to the figure of Qoheleth himself, whose name is certainly not a personal name, and whose identification with Solomon is literary rather than historical. We refer to the individual behind the words of wisdom as "implied author" or some other generic term. The representation of Qoheleth is simply that, a representation. The individual has disappeared, and life is transformed into sayings and anecdotes whose efficacy continue to capture the imagination of readers and writers, and whose concepts continue to find expression in the modern intellectual movement.⁴ This is anticipated in the frame-narration: "Of making many books there is no end." A fictional autobiography commenting that death brings about a forgetfulness of the past is a metaphor in and of itself.

There is little positive thinking when it comes to looking toward the stretches of time in the past or the present, though a considerable amount of material in Ecclesiastes considers these temporal levels. A more positive presentation comes in the discussion of event time, which relatively occupies the greatest amount of material among all the temporal levels we have identified. But this does not mean that the presentation of events in Ecclesiastes is entirely positive. Oppression, personal dissatisfaction, and the use of event time for reflection each elicit a negative judgement. Various aspects of event time are beyond human control. Oppression should not cause surprise (5:8), and various events catch people off guard to their hurt and failure (9:11-12). However, when humans are permitted to make a choice about the use of event time, Ecclesiastes presents companionship and enjoyment as positive uses of that time. Enjoyment finds expression in eating, drinking, toil as well as rest and peace.

While there is not a sustained engagement with wisdom, such as one would find in Prov 8 or Job 28, there is a variety of "sayings material" in the work, which all falls within the Qoheleth portion. While it is common to suggest that Ecclesiastes responds to a crisis in the wisdom tradition, many of the sayings would be equally at home in a work such as Proverbs as they are in Ecclesiastes. When offered a choice,

⁴ The congruence of Ecclesiastes and Post-Modernism has been noted. See, for example, Peter J. Leithart, *Solomon among the Postmoderns*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2008), Bartholomew, *Reading Ecclesiastes* especially chapter 6, and Mark Sneed, "(Dis)closure in Qohelet: Qohelet Deconstructed," *JSOT* 27, no. 1 (2002): 115-26.

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Qoheleth never advocates folly but advocates opportune choices. The choices matter, if only to allow someone to make further choices later on and escape negative consequences in the present. However, the irreverent wisdom of that many find in Ecclesiastes can be accounted for via the temporal scheme of event time juxtaposed to lifespan, generation and nature's time. That is, one chooses to act wisely not because it leads to future reward but because it is the right thing to do. While Qoheleth does not advocate an instant act-consequence scheme, he does recognize that the divine, who does as he wishes, sometimes does intervene (5:5). Thus, the frame-narration advocacy of "Fear God, and his commandments keep" in the sense of fulfilling duty lest something happen, is not as far off the thought of the musings of the Qoheleth character as it is made to be. Wisdom is beneficial in the moment, which Qoheleth demonstrates with anecdotes about wise men who save cities (9:13-15) or a wise youth who supplants an obviously talented king (4:13-16). But its ability to do anything more than provide opportunities for enjoyment, rest, and companionship is disavowed.

The reading of Ecclesiastes we have proposed here has not examined the relationship between structure, if there is one, and the presentation of temporal themes. That relationship could form the basis of a further study. Similarly, utilizing the temporal scheme developed here toward an exploration of other works in the Hebrew Bible could result in fruitful comparisons of temporal worldview. Yet, that there are temporal horizons and that these horizons are necessary foils for one another in Ecclesiastes is certain. The effect of reading the work through these temporal horizons is to create tension between the horizons themselves, but with the overall effect of easing the tensions between the usual contradictory elements within the work and to help shape a view of how wisdom can be considered positively in a work where everything is accounted as absurd. The absurdity arises, we contend, in the juxtaposition of the events of the day to day with the awareness of time human beings have been granted.

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